Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/honeyholler0000keit_t8b9

Honey Holler

Honey Holler

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY KEITH MACKAYE

With an Introduction by
OLIVER M. SAYLER

Woodcuts by the Author

NEW YORK · 1930
Brentano's · Publishers

Copyright 1930 by Robert Keith MacKaye. Manufactured in the United States of America by the Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York

Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that Honey Holler, *being fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union, is subject to a royalty. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion pictures, recitation, public reading, radio broadcasting, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. In its present form this play is dedicated to the reading public only. All inquiries regarding this play should be addressed to Samuel French, 25 West 45th Street, New York, N. Y. or the publishers, Brentano's, 225 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.*

INTRODUCTION

The general custom of publishing plays is still so comparatively new in America that the question of why a given play has been published unconsciously obtrudes. Usually the answer is that the play has scored a hit on the stage, and to publish it is merely to take advantage of reputation and curiosity thus engendered. Less often, plays are published simultaneously with stage production in the hope that each form of projection will materially assist the other. Sometimes, too, plays reach print which have visited in vain the offices of producers and agents until their authors subsidize publication to preserve their pride and self-confidence.

In bringing to the book-shelf the first full-fledged dramatic work of the third generation of the most distinguished playwriting family in the history of the American theatre, the publishers are actuated by still another motive. *Honey Holler* has not yet been produced in a theatre. It has been offered for production to a single management, the late Provincetown Playhouse, whose unfortunate death two months ago threw the play back into the lap of its author. Thence it has been lifted, regardless of what its future may be in the theatre, and is given herewith to the public as an achievement in dramatic literature able to stand on its own

feet without the aid of actor or scene designer, thus assuring the perpetuation of the name of MacKaye in our playwriting annals.

Apart from my faith in this particular play and my willing acknowledgment of its conquest of my imagination, I feel it a privilege to be associated with the inception of a new chapter in a notable tradition, a chapter which I am confident will unfold into other plays of unsuspected beauty, truth and mystic vision.

This MacKaye tradition is not a dead thing of dates and titles, not something that has to be exhumed and dusted off to acquire reality for us today. For sixty years, a living MacKaye has been contributing continuously to the output of American drama, with a further lease of life now in sight to carry the tradition well on toward the century mark. It was in December, 1870, when Steele MacKaye, then twenty-eight (about the same age as his grandson today), began work on his first play, *Monaldi*. Fresh from Paris and enthusiasm for Delsarte, he let a little over a year pass before he made his triple debut in the title rôle as author, professional actor and manager, at the St. James Theatre, New York. In a little over two decades, he put his name to thirty plays or versions of plays, of which *Hazel Kirke* is most vital residue.

Steele MacKaye's last play was his son Percy's first. *The World-Finder* (1894), which he wrote for the ill-starred Chicago Scenitorium of his own invention, had lyric choruses by the nineteen year old poet and

playwright of the second generation. The story of how the torch passed from father to son, as in a relay race, is told with such vivid and impassioned reverence in *Epoch,** the son's biographical tribute to his father, that I can do no more than cite the reader to those pages. Of such an instance of collaboration between son and grandson, I have no evidence. Robert Keith MacKaye makes his bow in the profession of his forefathers without aid from anyone. But this I know: The faith and spiritual communion of the father stands behind the son once more after the lapse of thirty-six years.

A new and strikingly original piece of imaginative writing, whether narrative, poetic or dramatic, has to measure itself by all conceivable parallels before it can claim the privilege of evaluation on its own merits. That is only natural. We get acquainted by degrees with the strange by noting how it differs from that which it resembles. The more original the work, of course, the fewer the parallels and the more remote the resemblances. In the end, all these stepping stones to understanding fall away, leaving us face to face with the stranger become friend.

Without pretending to cover the field, let me suggest a few of my own stepping stones to the understanding of *Honey Holler* and to the ultimate unreserved acceptance of it as an original work of creative

* EPOCH, *The Life of Steele MacKaye, Genius of the Theatre, in Relation to His Times and Contemporaries.* A Memoir, in Two Volumes. By Percy MacKaye. (Horace Liveright; New York.)

art. The first, though still valid in my memory, proved on investigation to be deceptive and at once reinforced the case for originality. Keith MacKaye's Leather Man was hardly out of his well when Hauptmann's *The Sunken Bell* came crowding in on me. Here, I said, is the most engaging water sprite since the Nickelmann in that mountain fantasy. I had first encountered Hauptmann's play at a very early age when its symbolic significance and Heinrich's problem rolled right over me and left me at the mercy of the poetry and imagery of the subordinate characters. My surprise, on checking those memories, to find that my beloved Nickelmann was only an insignificant means to Hauptmann's larger ends was matched only by my mounting excitement as I saw MacKaye's Leather Man grow from act to act in poetic power, without for an instant losing his substantial reality.

Next in the sequence of stepping stones came what I have always considered the masterpiece of Percy MacKaye, *The Scarecrow*. What could be more natural than that the son should take a treasured leaf out of his father's anthology? I watched, therefore, to see how the son would provide leading strings for his Leather Man to the demonic world, to the realm of the supernatural, like those which linked his father's Lord Ravensbane to the half-world of witch-beset Massachusetts in the seventeenth century. But no. No matter how eerie his goings and comings, the Leather Man remained in the world of flesh and blood with us, a character con-

ceived and wrought by its creator without apparent debt to anyone.

Still reaching for a parallel, a prototype, a stepping stone to understanding, I then turned to Synge's Playboy. Wasn't Christy Mahon a foster-father to the Leather Man of Honey Holler, with his bravado, his glib tongue, his way with women, his kinship with nature? After watching them stride arm in arm for a while, though, content that at last I had found my interpreter, I was disturbed with the suspicion and then the incontrovertible knowledge that this New England Playboy of MacKaye's had actually done the deeds of which he bragged. With a gesture of disdain, I saw him trip Christy and dash off among the rocky ravines of the Holler to put the fear of God and Devil in other credulous wayfarers.

Foiled of easy liaisons with the baffling central figure in this play, we may as well admit that the author has performed that rare feat—the creation of a legendary character so unusual, so distinctive, that he will take his place among our acquaintances like one whom we have known in the flesh. In his first play, young MacKaye has enriched our literature and our life.

The extraordinary thing is that he has done so without recourse to strained, grotesque or supernatural means. How well he is aware of the fact that we are disturbed today by the imposed juxtaposition or interweaving of the natural and the supernatural! To say

just why we are so disturbed would involve us in a lengthy discussion of contemporary American psychology, esthetics and philosophy. In tune with his age, young MacKaye rejects all those easy expedients for making a story and a character vivid and startling.

In tune with the leading thought of his age, though, he knows that the most drab and hum-drum facts and aspects of life carry with them a mystic aura. Although scorning the supernatural, he knows that sheer naturalism is not the whole truth, that there is a realism of the imagination, of the spirit, necessary to the complete understanding of life. And it is the poet in him, not the moralist, which provides that essential interpretation and commentary.

I can not imagine Keith MacKaye giving the answer Hauptmann is said to have cabled to Charles Henry Meltzer and Leo Ditrichstein when, hounded by the zealots of symbolism three decades ago, these American spokesmen of the German dramatist asked him what he meant by *The Sunken Bell*. The reply came: "I do not know." To such a question, the author of *Honey Holler* would undoubtedly point to those bold and searing and passion-fraught lines in Leather Man Joe's apologia in the play's final moments:

"But you all is layin' down an' fallin' behind in the stream of the world. The vanishin' moment is in the livin' of dreams. In it y' kin be all y've a mind to . . .

"Some 'd ruther be comforted than go huntin' . . .

The pride of y'ur own unknowin' an' dyin'-out is on 'y . . .

"The best a man kin do is what he 's a mind to . . .

"The finish had ought to be—like we had got up a appatite fer eatin' sleep—not jist fallin' into it."

In those lines and many more like them lies not merely the revelation of a character and the motivation of a play, but the advent of a new American dramatist of the first order and the enunciation of an American philosophy to confute Babbitt and his fellow Puritans.

OLIVER M. SAYLER

New York
February 9, 1930

CHARACTERS

MEN

Leather Man

Uncle Ky, or Ky'u'ghee (O'Hegan)

Cyrus Turner

Dave (O'Hegan)

Irve

Sniffin

Chappy

Ike

A Man

WOMEN

Frank Turner, Cyrus' wife

Lil Turner

A Woman

Guests, in Act Three

THE SCENE *is laid in a hilly region near the New York border of Connecticut. Between Act One and Act Two there is an interval of seven years; between Act Two and Act Three, an interval of three years.*

Act One

As the curtain rises, the scene disclosed is the back yard of the Turner farmhouse. All is mysterious—in the dark, luminous period of the day just before dawn.
A cricket sings—with long pauses and shrill brief notes. An owl hoots far off and a distant wind blows.
The dim form of the bucket hanging above the well moves and swings.
The cricket stops.
A form emerges from the well. It takes on the shadowy outlines of a tall lean man and is scarcely distinguishable from the shadowy and somewhat grotesque dark masses of the well and the rocks about the farm.
THE MAN *rises entirely out of the well and, leaving it, begins pacing up and down.*
A pale light commences to illuminate the East (up stage, right).

A fox is heard barking, far away.
There is a rattle of a chain on wood and stone (down right), followed by a slight deep growl. A large dog projects his head and fore feet from behind an obstacle (perhaps the rear of a dog kennel, down right). The dog yawns—then whines softly.
THE MAN *waves to the dog slowly. The dog vanishes.*
A dull, reverberating noise is heard within the house. THE MAN *moves stealthily back toward the well and stands listening. There is a pause. A window shuts somewhere on the other side of the house.*
Silence. The cricket chirps. THE MAN *moves. The cricket stops.*
THE MAN *goes slowly across stage, once; then moves (up right) and mounts a rock against a bit of wall. Only his back is visible.*
He straightens—looking at the sun rise—takes a deep breath—stretches his arms wide, then lowers them slowly. He thinks.
Someone is heard moving inside the house. THE MAN *whisks back and down the well.*
A YOUNG WOMAN *opens one of the kitchen windows and props it with a stick. She opens the door. She is carrying a broom. She rests, leaning on the broom in the doorway. She props the broom against the door and moves down onto the door stone and looks at the sunrise. The dog chain rattles. She looks down right, then goes over and mounts the rock against the wall and imitates almost exactly the pantomime of the shadowy man—*

while the rising sun shines much more brightly and increases in intensity as she stands there.
Frogs are heard chugging, far off.
The figure of a tall, large, sodden OLD DRUNKARD *appears in the door-way—shuffling.*
THE GIRL *hears him and turns.*

THE GIRL

Whut got you up so early, Uncle Ky?

[*The old fellow shuffles out, and looks up at the sky. He conceals a cider jug under his left arm.*]

UNCLE KY

Nice day, ain't it, Lil?

LIL

[*Crossing to the door.*] Dave's still sleepin'. Bet this is the fust time in forty years you got out-a bed—when y' couldn't spit over y'ur shadder.

UNCLE KY

Had idee, I'd be goin' over to Eddy's.

[LIL *sees the cider jug.*]

LIL

Oh! Eddy said he 'd have cider fer y', did he?

UNCLE KY

Yes-yes—y' might say.

LIL

Liquor never done y' better 'n give y' sight of day rise—glowin' like yonder, Uncle Ky.

UNCLE KY

It's right clear, Lil—plenty of dew—be fair day—but, so early—walkin' it's turruble damp!

[Exit UNCLE KY, *off right.*

The cricket chirps. LIL *listens and brushes her hair with her hand. She walks down right. The figure of* THE MAN *emerges from the well behind her. She turns and sees him.*]

LIL

Oh! [*She retreats and turns. She stands still.* THE MAN *steps over the edge of the well and stands still, looking at her. She looks at him.*] Is it you? [*She wipes her eyes with her hand.*] It's kind-a misty. [*She looks again.*] Y' know, I don't know why I keep thinkin' I see y'—standin' thur. I guess it's because I'm lonesome —kind-a. [*She looks away.*] Oh, if thur wuz sunthin' to my feelin's that wuz real! [*She turns to* THE MAN.] *I* know y' ain't thur—all I been hopin' fer, longin' fer. What they pester folks with sich feelin's as I got—when

thur ain't nuthin' to 'em?—nuthin' but chores—an' men, as don't understand nuthin'. Devil take y'—an' me! [*She turns her back and starts off right.*]

THE MAN

Lil.

[LIL *stops—but does not turn. She hesitates—goes on a step—and then, as if drawn, she turns, and sees* THE MAN *holding out his hand.*]

THE MAN

Lil—Lil—don't go 'way.

LIL

Am I dreamin'—in the comin' of the mornin'?

THE MAN

We's stretchin' out our dream livin' [*He stretches forth his hands.*]—you an' me both—like the un-endin' shadders of mornin', Lil.

LIL

Y' re speakin'—or—is it my own heart—I'm listenin' to?

THE MAN

We's speakin' together.

LIL

We's speakin'—nothin' else don't matter. If y' re true, or not—I don't keer—here's one time.

THE MAN

Together.

LIL

Between the dark time an' the day, thur's a passin' away of sunthin'—like a tune—travelin' on— Kin y' tell me? I been wantin' to foller it.

THE MAN

A passin' away in the mornin' an' the evenin' an' all times, Lil—only y' jist ain't noticin' so much.

LIL

What is it that's passin'?

THE MAN

Life is growin'—an' tunin', an' paintin' the sky. [*He points at the East and both look.*] A-mixin' the colors —an' a-mixin' an' mowin' men an' women.

LIL

Always goin' on.

THE MAN

Never endin'.

LIL

Me, I want to go out, too. Me, I'm promised to marry Dave—but—I ain't never been outside of Honey Holler. Ain't I a right to go—mebby—an' discover?

THE MAN

Yes—the mornin' goes ahead of the sun—sweepin' over the woods an' the mountains—out of the East, into the West—same as you an' me—travelin' on—an' vanishin'. [*He raises his hand.*] Them as lives—is standin' in the vanishin' moment.

LIL

Vanishin'—

THE MAN

What y' ve a mind to—in the questin' of the moment —of to-morrer—th' ain't nobody else kin tech— It's yourn.

LIL

Mine.

THE MAN

Whatever y' ve true mind to—go do it.

LIL

But out yonder!

THE MAN

Go.

LIL

'Spite of 'em all—an' thur thinkin'—an' my promise to marry Dave?

THE MAN

'Spite of Hell Fire—'spite of me.

LIL

But I don't want to lose you.

THE MAN

We's sep'rate, together—together, we's sep'rate. I'll give it to y' from the Bible:—"Y' got to lose y'ur life —to find it."

LIL

Lose—now?

THE MAN

Lose in every moment of time an' thinkin'—go. I'm with them as is lonesome—but—only—I'm with them as kin do without me. An' only I help them, I kin leave. Go! Yonder!

[LIL *looks off into the sunset where* THE MAN *is pointing. When she turns back* THE MAN *has vanished —into the well.*

AN OLD BENT MAN, *with white silky hair, leaning on two canes, appears in the door-way.*]

THE OLD MAN

O Lil—Lil—ain't that Lil?

LIL

Yes, Pa.

THE OLD MAN

I ain't blind—only a little bit, only a little bit. I knew it wuz you. Y' re kind-a queer, Lil.

LIL

Yea-a.

THE OLD MAN

What is it—the Leather Man?

LIL

Pa, seems like I seen . . .

[*She draws her hand across her eyes and goes off around the house, left.* THE OLD MAN *stares after her, shaking his head.—Then he listens. A shuffling is heard.* UNCLE KY *appears, up right.*]

THE OLD MAN

Mornin', Ky.

UNCLE KY

Mornin', Cyrus.

[*A noise is heard within the house.* CYRUS *goes to the chopping block and busies himself with preparing kindlings, cutting up last year's bean poles into stove lengths.*]

UNCLE KY

[*Drinking cider.*] Ah!

[A LANKY YOUNG MAN *appears in the doorway. He is fastening the suspenders of his pants.*]

UNCLE KY

Mornin', Dave.

DAVE

Ho hum! Hot a'ready.

UNCLE KY

Too hot to work.

[DAVE *receives the cider jug from* UNCLE KY *and helps himself.*]

UNCLE KY

That's good cider.

DAVE

Ah! It is fer the time of year.

UNCLE KY

It's most time fer a new apple crop. Summer's gettin' on.

DAVE

Allus is warm here in Honey Holler.

CYRUS

Yea-a, that's what brings the bees.

[*Enter* LIL, *from left, with a quantity of washing.*]

DAVE

Mornin', Lil. [LIL *does not answer.*] Lil's queer ways.

CYRUS

She's one them has seen the Leather Man.

UNCLE KY

She ain't feared.

DAVE

Lil ain't feared of nuthin'—be y', Lil?

LIL

[*Taking a baby chick out of the clothes.*] I give him a ride. Ain't he cute, Dave?

DAVE

Got to be an old, sprackly hen, yit.

UNCLE KY

Dave claims y' seen the Leather Man.

LIL

Yea-a.

CYRUS

Well, I wouldn't go fur off, nights—if I wuz you.

DAVE

No—I wouldn't.

CYRUS

Might be some one deceivin' y'. Y' can't tell.

LIL

I ain't a-feared. I seen him. [THE MEN *draw back.*] He wuz tall—an' straight standin'—with the mist 'round under his feet—an' the risin' sun on his head—a-lookin' off into the cool of the mornin' over the mountain—most like he 'd rise with the fog—an' disappear into the heat of the day.

DAVE

Let's fergit him—y' re more 'n 'nough make a man nervous—way y' talk.

LIL

Y' re coward scairt.

DAVE

Well, if y' ain't seein' ghosts—what is you? Whur d' y' see him?

LIL

By the well.

DAVE

God, Lil—y'ur Ma, Sarah, wuz killt right thur—whew!

CYRUS

Well, I seen some peculiar things in my time.

UNCLE KY

If the Leather Man is human—y' can't tell! An' if he ain't—it's jist as bad—only worse.

CYRUS

I seen him onc't—when I wuz mowin'. Them days I could see.

DAVE

Mebby it blinded y'.

CYRUS

No—I ain't blind yit. It's my age.

DAVE

Well, Lil, I don't want y' trapusin' 'round. Remember in 'nother week, y' re goin' to be my wife.

LIL

To-morrer ain't come yit.

CYRUS

Now, don't you two git quarrelin' afore y' re married. Winter's comin' y' got to set to home.

LIL

Time enough till winter, Pa.

CYRUS

I dunno, Lil, I dunno. Winter's comin'. Heard one them little card-an'-spins inside of the house.

DAVE

Whut's them—card-an'-spins?

CYRUS

Crickets, some calls 'em. When y' hear 'em inside, y' know it's comin' on winter—time to card an' spin. [*To* LIL.] That were one of y'ur Grand Uncle's sayin's. Mostly, he didn't say nothin'—jist set by the fire, an' poke it up a bit; but when he 'd hear them card-an'-spins, he 'd begin drinkin'.

UNCLE KY

He wuz allus drunk, winters.

CYRUS

That's how he come to let the place run down.
[*A thumping is heard inside the house.*]

UNCLE KY

What's that—the Old Woman?

LIL

Yea-a, that's Frank. [LIL *goes to her wash.*]

UNCLE KY

Too bad, she's all crippled up.

LIL

But she's tough as ever.

UNCLE KY

My brother, Joe, wuz her fust.

DAVE

Preachin' Joe, the minister?

UNCLE KY

Yea-a, before she married Cyrus.

FRANK

[*Speaking out through the open window—in a harsh, heavy tone.*] Cyrus!

CYRUS

Yea-a, Frank.

FRANK

Git my kindlin's, y' poor, old mule! [*She disappears inside.*]

CYRUS

Your brother didn't teach her no religion, Ky.

UNCLE KY

Seems so.

[FRANK *comes out, through the door.*]

DAVE

What y' putting down, Ma?

[FRANK *is lowering something into the well.*]

FRANK

Jist a pail of butter to cool. Lil, the clothes'll be bilin' soon. Git y' some rinse water.

LIL

I got to milk—ask Dave to git it.

FRANK

Git it Dave, hear me?

DAVE

Sure, Ma.

[*Exit* FRANK *into house.* DAVE *sits down.*]

UNCLE KY

Too bad. She's most lost the use of her legs, seems so.

DAVE

Yea-a.

CYRUS

Mebby it wuz a jedgment on her. Still, she walks some.

UNCLE KY

I reckon, little bit, onc't in a while, but less all the time.

LIL

I'd think you two could work—fer a change.

DAVE

I can't find nuthin' to do.

UNCLE KY

Seems, tho, thur 'd ought to be sunthin'.

FRANK

[*Out of the window.*] Git that wash water.

DAVE

Yes, Ma.

LIL

The new calf can't hardly stand yit—but he ain't a-feared to wrastle fer his supper. He'll work harder'n any men folks 'round here.

[*Exit, up left.*]

UNCLE KY

Looks like y' re marryin' trouble, Dave.

DAVE

Well, Ma is set on the match. I reckon we'll make out —between us.

UNCLE KY

Lil's queer.

DAVE

She kin read.

UNCLE KY

Some kin—some can't.

CYRUS

Y'ur grand uncle—they claim he could read.

DAVE

Never done him no good.

CYRUS

He wuz allus drunk, winters. That's how he come to let the place run down.

[*Exit* CYRUS, *with wood, into the house.*]

DAVE

You stayed here last night, Ky?

UNCLE KY

Yea-a. Someone broke into my cabin.

DAVE

Take anythin'?

UNCLE KY

Cider an' a five-dollar gold piece.

DAVE

Five dollars is a lot.

UNCLE KY

It is.

[*Enter* LIL, *with two pails.*]

LIL

If you two could milk, I'd git y'ur washin' done, time to hang out.

DAVE

Them clothes kin wait, Lil. Fetch me a clean glass.

LIL

Huh!

[LIL *goes off, up right.*]

UNCLE KY

She ain't an obligin' woman.

DAVE

[*Drinking without the glass.*] Well, thur is one thing I don't 'preciate 'bout Lil—I got feelin's, sometimes—she's got carryin'-ons with a ghost.

UNCLE KY

Lil is unusu'l.

DAVE

Yea-a.

UNCLE KY

Give her time.

FRANK

[*Out window.*] Git Lil that wash water, Dave, hear me!

DAVE

Yes, Ma. [*To* UNCLE KY] It's cooler 'round front.

UNCLE KY

Yea-a, it is.

[*They go off around house, up right.*

The stage is empty for a moment. Then the figure of the LEATHER MAN *is seen emerging from the well, but he ducks back out of sight as* CYRUS *comes out of the house.* CYRUS *hears him, and pauses, listening. The dog chain rattles. Enter* LIL, *from up right, with her pails.*]

LIL

Pa—someone 's been milkin' them cows ag'in.

CYRUS

I thought I heard sunthin' jist now.

LIL

Jist that dog, Blue. He 'd a-heard a stranger.

CYRUS

Must be.

LIL

Someone 's prankin'. The calf 'll need it all to-night. I'm tired, Pa. Seems so thur wern't nuthin' but work fer a woman.

CYRUS

I know, Lil.

LIL

I git bitter 'bout what's holdin' me back—chores an' all. I ain't got no peace here, Pa—'spite the place is the makin's of peace.

CYRUS

You 'd ought to git pleasure, Lil.

LIL

I ain't no peace, 'ceptin' when I been alone—an' visioned I seen the Leather Man.

CYRUS

Y' seen him?

LIL

Yea-a, I seen him—an' he's looked at me. But I dassn't let on much. Folks would be thinkin' thur wuz sunthin' queer 'bout me.

CYRUS

Funny, thur's most allus a rumpus 'bout him, autumn times—'bout this time of year.

[*The* LEATHER MAN *appears in the well, behind* LIL *and* CYRUS, *but is seen by neither. He listens.*]

LIL

Autumn nights, I git thinkin' of the outside—layin' awake nights, listenin' to them squirrels scamperin' on the roof—the frogs a-fur off—listenin' to the men—an' Frank—drinkin' an' swearin' an' sinnin'. An' then—thur's one of them little card-an'-spins—happy, under the corner of the mattin'—chirpin'. They allus come in—when the Leather Man's 'round. Seems like he's one could answer all I been wantin' to know.

CYRUS

It's funny 'bout them card-an'-spins.

LIL

They go strayin' all spring an' summer—an' then—cold times—they come into the house, whur it's cozy, an' goes 'round talkin' of all the wonders thur be—most like they wuz the Leather Man's messengers.

CYRUS

I reckon he 's a spirit.

LIL

Some nights I go up on the cliff of the Mountain—an' sometimes I'll think I see him—when the moon is risin'.

CYRUS

Ever speak?

LIL

After a time—seems so, we talk a little—low—most like it wuz the wind stirrin'—an' then he ain't thur. Seems like I wuz dreamin'.

CYRUS

Most likely.

LIL

He means an awful lot to me. Y' re the only one I kin tell 'bout it. Most folks, they ain't so 's I talk to 'em—like I do to you, Pa.

CYRUS

I like to talk to y', Lil, I do.

LIL

It's pretty—them autumn leaves—an' them chickens scratchin'—ain't it, Pa?

CYRUS

Reckon it be, Lil, could I see. Thur wuz days when I wuz young. All things wuz young—but a man has got

to work—it's good ground 'round here. If Dave 'd tend it. I can't, no more. Me, I take to fiddlin'.

LIL

Them card-an'-spins is allus tunin'—never ketch the time—but allus tunin'.

FRANK

[*Speaking out the window.*] What ails y', Lil?

LIL

Look at this. [*She holds up an empty pail.*] The cows is 'bout milked dry ag'in.

FRANK

Yea-a.

LIL

It don't bother y' none.

FRANK

Reckon—reckon, mebby, it wuz Ky.

LIL

Ky-u-ghee wouldn't milk—lessen he 'd starve.

FRANK

Git stirrin', both of y'! [LIL *goes off, left, with pails.* CYRUS *has an armful of wood.*] Can't y' tote no more'n that, y' old mule?—Y' re plumb useless.

CYRUS

Give me time, Frank. [*He goes into the house.*]

FRANK

Y' kin stay an' stir wash.

[*The stage is empty. The* LEATHER MAN *emerges and sits on the edge of the well. The dog whines.*]

LEATHER MAN

Want to git loose? [*The dog whines again, and the chain rattles.*] I'll jist let y' loose. [*He moves furtively over.*] Don't they never let y' loose no more? Y' re chained up same as Lil. Some 'd ruther drink 'n go huntin', I reckon. Hello, Blue—git down—sst! Thur—git along with y'. Don't fall—y'ur legs is weak with bein' chained. Y' d rot away in a little, layin' here in the mud. Run—take a smell—thur's raccoon yit in the brook bottom—like when y' wuz young—an' rabbits! Ha! Rabbits is too slick fer old shanks like yourn now. Go 'long—have a good time, young un.

[*He moves back leisurely to the well and sits—then vanishes, as* LIL *returns.* LIL *commences to wash.* CYRUS *comes out, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.*]

CYRUS

She kin burn more wood 'n any woman I ever see.

LIL

Yea-a, she ain't sparin' in nuthin', Pa.

CYRUS

Whut's troubelin' y', Lil?

LIL

Nuthin' only I ain't done much steppin' out.

CYRUS

Y' d ought to dance more with the men.

LIL

Mostly I set back at dances—an' watch the rest of 'em. I got to. No one else don't play so good. I allus play—an' a banjo ain't a man.

CYRUS

Yea-a, but thur's lots set back—y' see more. Fetch my fiddle fer me. The Old Lady 's out front.

LIL

Yea-a, y' kin hear her thumpin'.

[LIL *steps into the house and comes out again with a fiddle which she gives to* CYRUS.]

CYRUS

Frank won't hear us if we play soft. Chappy sent me a new set of strings.

LIL

Chappy 's nice man.

CYRUS

Yea-a. I like to sit here an' play—where Sarah died. Lil, she used to say Honey Holler wuz made fer her—it were a land flowin' with milk an' honey.

LIL

I guess she spoke it about right—milk an' honey—them bees under the sheathin' is drippin' over with it. I like to listen to 'em—hot nights—dronin'—all the time.

CYRUS

Hot nights, th're fannin' the honey with thur wings—coolin' the comb. Well, Lil, when you an' Dave 's married, y' ll still hear 'em right thur in the wall to the head of the bed—singin' fer the bride.

LIL

Yes, Pa.

CYRUS

Y'ur Ma, Lil—not her in thur, but your Ma, Sarah—she liked to hear [*He taps the fiddle.*]—this 'un.

LIL

Me, too.

CYRUS

Sarah were young an' I were old—but she liked my playin'.

LIL

She warn't young as me?

CYRUS

'Bout same as you, Lil—but she didn't live long—a-fore that feller got her. I ain't y'ur real Pa. Sarah were in trouble, real trouble, seemed to me.

LIL

It wuz good of you to marry her, that way, Pa.

CYRUS

I done what I could—an' then—I wuz out milkin'—come back, an' thur she lay—by the well here—her neck broke.

LIL

She might of fell.

CYRUS

Nn' [*shakes his head*], thur wuz marks on her—a man done it. Might been same as got her into trouble. I'd a killt him—if I'd known who. [*He tunes the fiddle.*] I brung y' up well as I could since then, Lil.

LIL

Y' sure did, Pa—only fer marryin' ag'in—*that* in thur.

CYRUS

I regret it more 'n you do. But Frank means well.

LIL

It t'ain't nuthin', Pa. [*Enter* UNCLE KY, *from around the house.*]—What got *you* started?

UNCLE KY

I like to keep movin', kind-a up an' down, this hot weather. [*He ambles toward the door.*]

LIL

But not far.

UNCLE KY

Well, not so far as to git over heated.

LIL

Now, Pa—we'll hear 'bout the weather.

UNCLE KY

Well, it certainly is a nice day—only the sun is pretty bright.

[*Exit* UNCLE KY, *into house.*]

LIL

Thur he goes in to Frank.

CYRUS

Father Time, I call him.

LIL

Father Time ain't no slower.

CYRUS

Well, he 's movin' now.

LIL

Move, not him—he jist gits adjusted. It itches him to set too long in one place—that's all.

CYRUS

He gits along with Frank—bein' own brother to Frank's fust husband, I reckon, is the reason.

LIL

Yea-a, ain't it funny—they agree good.

CYRUS

Thur, she's tuned. I like to play over water. Sounds better. We'll play real low. . . . See how the well-holler swells it.

LIL

It's most like it wuz answerin'—like little birds answerin' one 'nother in the evenin'. Love 's some like that —sometimes—ain't it, Pa?

CYRUS

I reckon it is—an' it t'ain't!

LIL

Some one to answer y'.

CYRUS

Folks as belong together 'll breathe most together—sometimes.

LIL

You 're all I got, Pa.

CYRUS

An' y' re 'bout all I got, Lil.

LIL

The Leather Man—I guess he ain't nuthin' but a dream. But I want some one, flesh an' blood, kin answer me. Seems so, I'd found him.

CYRUS

Found *him!*

LIL

Thur 's a new man 'round. Irve 's his name.

CYRUS

Y' re an engaged woman. Dave 's got sunthin' to him. You two is well acquainted.

LIL

Guess that 's the trouble.

CYRUS

Don't git to lookin' at other men. It won't do y' no good. It ain't right. You got to git used to what y've agreed to—like me an' Frank.

LIL

I reckon.

CYRUS

She were a beauty, Lil, y'ur Ma, singin' in the evenin' —singin' you to sleep. You must of got some music from her. You kin handle most anything—even the organ inside ain't beyant y'.

LIL

Dave kin play, too.

CYRUS

He's tuck to fiddlin'—but I seen the time when Dave 'd tune up—and a-fore he'd finish, thur wouldn't be a rat left in the cellar.

LIL

He kin play dance music.

CYRUS

Funny, Frank ain't got no ear fer music.

LIL

No, she ain't got no music in her.

CYRUS

[*Playing.*] "*Young an' no troubles*" that's the way it goes. And "*Annie Laurie.*" [*He plays a refrain from* "*Annie Laurie.*"]

[*Enter* FRANK, *from house.*]

FRANK

Shut that damn fiddle an' git me some kindlin's. Seems like you could work in the kitchen, now y're too crippled up to be layin' wall.

CYRUS

Lil, put up my fiddle fer me. [LIL *does so.*] I done my spell of work, Frank, but thur's a time fer frolic, too. I seen you sewin' yistiddy, an' it Sunday.

FRANK

Take y'ur preachin' to hell an' git me a binful of kindlin's—or y' ll git no supper.

CYRUS

[*Going.*] Y' ll lose more before the week 's out than y' ll make, workin' on a Sunday.

FRANK

Lil, y' ain't got y'ur mind on y'ur washin'. Monday, wash day, ain't no time to dream y' re philanderin' with that cheap feller, Irve.

LIL

He ain't cheap.

FRANK

He's tight. I'm speakin' to y' like a mother.

LIL

Y' ain't my mother.

FRANK

Y' got a dooty to me.

LIL

Y' got Pa by trickery.

FRANK

He got you the same way—jinin' hisself to a virtue-spiled woman. He only done it out of kindness.

LIL

He an' Ma wuz lovers.

FRANK

Might be, men is weak. But he ain't tricked no children out of me. Dave wuz my fust husband's boy. He's pure O'Hegan.

LIL

Funny y' don't say nuthin' much 'bout Number One.

FRANK

He died.

LIL

I ain't surprised—if I knew how.

FRANK

Huh?

LIL

Dave, nor Uncle Ky-u-ghee, don't rightly know what happened to him.

FRANK

Y' better shet y'ur mouth on men, till y' know 'bout 'em. I never wanted fer a man.

[*Exit* FRANK *into house.* LIL *is left alone washing.* A YOUNG MAN *appears, up right. He is about thirty, or younger. His clothes are neater than those of the other characters, and his hair is slicked down.*]

THE YOUNG MAN

Well, how is Lil, this mornin'?

LIL

Shht! Don't let no one see y', Irve.

IRVE

I kin allus skin off down the lane.

LIL

I got to do up some wash fer Ma. Nice day in the Holler to-day, ain't it?

IRVE

'Bout the same as other days. I got a present fer y'. [*He holds out a coin.*]

LIL

It's a five-dollar gold piece. I can't tech it.

IRVE

Y' kin look at it.

LIL

Y' must a-been clear to a bank fer that.

IRVE

Well, yes—y' might say—money jist sticks to me, don't it? I'm askin' y' to marry me, Lil.

LIL

I'm spoke fer.

IRVE

I don't keer.

LIL

Y' hadn't ought to ask me.

IRVE

I'm askin' jist the same. Lil, y're wild, an' strong, an' the best lookin' dark-complected woman I ever see.

LIL

Do y' like me?

IRVE

Would I be here—if I didn't? Will y' run off from this hog-pen of a place, with a good man?

LIL

I won't talk to no man that's spiteful 'bout this place. The Holler's good ground. I wuz borned here, and I like it.

IRVE

Come along—we'll buy the weddin' dress.

LIL

What weddin' dress? It's the fust I ever heard of any weddin' dress.

IRVE

I treat a woman handsome. I wouldn't think of marryin' without presentin' her, at least, a weddin' dress.

LIL

The Old Lady claims y're tight.

IRVE

Does that look like I'm tight? 'Course I ain't spendthrift. No—nor I don't scruple to pick up what other folks leave layin' 'round an' can't take keer of. It's doin' a service to the commoonity, that is.

LIL

How I know all y' say 's true?

IRVE

Because I love y'—like I ain't never loved nobody—not even my mother. I hold y', an' I won't never let y' go—withouten y' want to.

LIL

Look out.

[IRVE *and* LIL *separate.* IRVE *hides, down the lane. Enter* CYRUS.]

LIL

Pa.

CYRUS

Yea-a?

LIL

Would y' help me?

CYRUS

What is it, Lil?

LIL

Would y' speak to this man, Irve—supposin' y' could?

CYRUS

He 's here, is he?

LIL

Y' won't tell Ma?

CYRUS

No.—Whur be y'?

IRVE

[*Appearing.*] Hello, Cyrus.

CYRUS

Git clos'ter. [*He peers at* IRVE.] What y' doin' 'round here?

IRVE

I aim to marry y'ur daughter.

CYRUS

She 's promised.

IRVE

But she ain't married.

CYRUS

Kin y' keep a wife?

IRVE

Yea-a.

CYRUS

Suppose y' could run the farm here?

IRVE

I'm goin' outside, whur thur 's progress.

LIL

He don't want to stay, Pa.

IRVE

Y're all right, back here in the Holler, but the dumb blindness of sweatin' is on y'.

LIL

Frank's comin'.

[FRANK *is heard thumping inside.*]

IRVE

Want *her* fer mother-in-law? [*He hides again. Enter* FRANK.]

FRANK

Here's some wash fer y', Lil.—Come git it. [LIL *takes the wash.*] Cyrus, we got to bile wash—y' ain't got 'nough wood. God, my legs! What ails y', Lil. Can't y' work outside—with me standin' over the stove?

CYRUS

Y're a big woman, Frank; I can't git in.

FRANK

You kin go 'round the front way.

[CYRUS *goes off, around the house.*]

LIL

I do all the outside work on this place, besides inside.

FRANK

Jist wait till y're married.

[*Exit* FRANK, *into house.*]

IRVE

[*Approaching again.*] Ain't she cute? Bet the red adders dassn't bite her.

LIL

No, she 'd pizen a snake. Why, even she got Pa by trickery.

IRVE

Aimed to ketch him, eh?

LIL

Yea-a. After Sarah, my Ma, died, Pa used to drive the oxen over thur fer wood—back of the ridge it wuz —an' he got acquainted. She fixed him jam an' the like.

IRVE

An' then?

LIL

[*Coyly.*] After a time it got more serious.

IRVE

I reckon more of everythin'.

LIL

'Cept jam!

IRVE

Y' ain't tricked me, Lil.

LIL

Nor, I don't aim to. Thur 's children 'd come—mebby. What y' got fer 'em?

IRVE

Money 's easy, out thur.

LIL

Money ain't easy here—but we allus got a house, milk an' honey, wood an' water—an' then chickens. Do them town ladies ever go-in fer chickens, Irve?

IRVE

Sure they do—an' not in no ramshackle place neither. Why! I seen 'em in stone houses, all fer 'emselves.

LIL

Chickens?

IRVE

Yea-a.

LIL

Seems foolish.

IRVE

With china dishes.

LIL

Don't kid me, Irve.

IRVE

I ain't, honest I ain't. I wouldn't lie to y' in nuthin', Lil.

LIL

Mebby I could have 'em that way. You believe in ghosts, Irve?

IRVE

Thur ain't none.

LIL

I wuz thinkin' of my Ma. [*Pause.*] She liked the home place here, same as me. She wuz murdered right here—on this stone.

[IRVE *gets up.*]

LIL

Cyrus ain't my real Pa. You know, don't y'?

IRVE

Yea-a. I don't keer. I'm dry. [*He draws himself a drink.*]

LIL

It's nice here in the Holler, Irve. Pa built the place up. The beams in the barn is hull red-oak trees. It wuz sold fer rum, an' the buildin 's fell down—why, most into the ground—y' might say, *most mixed it did with the ground.*

IRVE

He ain't patched it, lately.

LIL

He ain't able. It wuz all done-over, 'ceptin' only the well. That's good as ever 't was, afore the Revolutionary war.

IRVE

Afore the Revolutionary war! Thur ain't no progress here, Lil. You ain't up-an-comin' folks—'ceptin you, Lil.—I tell y', Lil, thur's two kinds of folks. The goers an'

the comers. I'm a comer. I ain't no lay-in-the-mud. I'm goin' to climb. Y' got to have respect fer y'urself, be somebody!

LIL

I'm self respectin', an' who *ain't* somebody? [*A whistling is heard, off stage.*] Dave 's comin'.

IRVE

Dave 's lit again. Whur 'd y'ur grand uncle keep *his* rum?

LIL

Don't know. Wern't no celler, them days. Some say he kep' it cool in the well—what he needed to drink from day to day.

IRVE

I love y', Lil.—Don't y' love me?

LIL

I reckon. [IRVE *embraces her.*] I ain't so much, Irve. Mebby I'd be a burden to y'.

IRVE

Y're comin'?

LIL

Yes, I'm comin' with y', an' be y'ur wife.

[*The whistling grows louder.* IRVE *kisses* LIL *and starts off, up right, but returns.*]

IRVE

Someone comin' down the lane.

LIL

Dave 's comin'.

IRVE

I'll get in the well. [*He gets half in.*] It 's real handy.

LIL

Don't fall.

IRVE

Funny—Dave ain't y'ur brother, is he?

LIL

No—he ain't no relation. Pa wouldn't stand fer me marryin' him if he wuz. He's Ma's, by her fust. Both she an' Pa's been spliced twic't. You ain't a-feared the well's haunted?

IRVE

Naw—ghosts, huh! I'm funny that way. I jist ain't interested in them kind of things. I dunno. I guess I'm above 'em. [*The bucket swings in the well. There is a little wind. Both see the bucket move.*]—Wind.

LIL

Look out, they'll see y'! [IRVE *goes down the well. Enter a* STRANGER, *up right.*] Mornin', Sniffin!

SNIFFIN

Thought I'd call on Ky-u-ghee. [*He comes down stage toward the kennel.*] Whur's Blue?

LIL

Well, now—if he ain't slipped his ketch!

SNIFFIN

I jist tuck interest 'cause I'm thinkin' of runnin' fer a political job—pound warden, or mebby sheriff. I tell y', thur's trouble 'round. They say it's the Leather Man.

DAVE

[*Entering from around the house, up left.*] Well! Sniffin!

SNIFFIN

I jist come from town, Dave. Sunthin' made a mess outen Ike Miller's clam bake.

LIL

Or else they wuz drunk!

SNIFFIN

Might be—but they claimed they seen a man—or a ghost—an' Anse William's cow lost a calf.

DAVE

Well, now!

LIL

Well, I been seein' things lately—y' never kin tell—it's skeery. *You* look well!

DAVE

Er—some.

LIL

Dave, y' been settin' cider-sluicin' with Uncle Ky. He's all right, 'cept Ky-u-ghee 's 'round. Him an' Dave git drinkin', only Ky don't show it. It jist soaks in on him.

DAVE

Ky come all the way from Visty.

LIL

Visty's whur he belongs.

SNIFFIN

Been any happenin's 'round here, Dave?

DAVE

God, whut is it?

SNIFFIN

Whur 's Blue?

LIL

He jist slipped the ketch.

DAVE

Well, now—I tell you—got to git that dog back.

SNIFFIN

Wait a minute—thur 's trouble 'round. I tell y'—Gid Reynolds had the widder Pye-att's hoss in to be shod yistiddy evenin', an' it died a-fore he could git the shoes on.

DAVE

Y' don't say!

SNIFFIN

She put the blame on Gid—wanted he should open it—but Gid said—can't open it in his shop—an' claimed the Leather Man killt it—or else it died of dyspep-sia.

DAVE

No hoss ever died of dyspep-sia. [*He starts to draw some water.*]

SNIFFIN

Yea-a. An' the Pye-att boy burnt hisself pickin' up one of the shoes with his fingers, right red-hot outen the forge.

LIL

He ain't right in his head—never wuz.

DAVE

Ky wuz tellin' how the owls got in Chappy's guinea hens ag'in.—God! [*He sets down the bucket and backs off.*] Thur's a card-an'-spin in the bucket—swishin' round!

SNIFFIN

Yea-a?

DAVE

God, jist look at him! That's the fust time I ever see one come outen the well.

LIL

'T ain't nuthin'. I ain't so proud to be marryin' a man what's scairt of a bug.

UNCLE KY

It ain't jist this, Lil. It ain't only jist the bug, Lil.

DAVE

It ain't no common bug. You see one—y' might see the Leather Man.

SNIFFIN

I ain't never seen him.

DAVE

Lil claims to—an I bet Frank has.

CYRUS

[*Entering.*] She don't let on.

SNIFFIN

They say he's the Devil himself.

CYRUS

Yea-a, Frank an' him 'd most make a pair.

SNIFFIN

God, Cyrus—I 'gree with y'.

UNCLE KY

[*Appearing from inside the house, with his jug.*] I reckon—he's sunthin' like the memories of the night time—in the mornin'.

SNIFFIN

Is, fer a fact.

UNCLE KY

If he's the Devil, he's comin' to ketch up on his own.

DAVE

Who's his own?

UNCLE KY

My brother, Joe, he knowed—when he wuz livin'. He wuz a minister—like my Daddy wuz. Poor Joe!

SNIFFIN

He wuz Frank's fust.

UNCLE KY

Yea-a—he wuz, onc't.

DAVE

When the Leather Man's 'round—it's God-awful still in the woods—make y'ur shirt crawl.

CYRUS

Does seem like the country 'd kind of wake up—when he's 'round.

LIL

Or the people!

SNIFFIN

Well, if he's a ghost—driftin' round like a fog on the ground, might kind-a key things up.

DAVE

Sure, sure!

SNIFFIN

Well, I tell y'—I think thur's a meanin' in it.

UNCLE KY

Joe 'd say it wuz a parable.

SNIFFIN

Mebby it's the shadder of doom.

DAVE

Who y' mean—in partic'lar?

SNIFFIN

Everybody—we're all jist waitin' fer the tomb.

UNCLE KY

An' y' never kin tell when.

CYRUS

Thur's ghosts what fit in the Revolutionary war—like my uncle—he that sold the place fer rum. He wuz a pirate, too, they say—that come ashore and settled down here in his age with the Indians.

LIL

Don't it seem to y' like Frank 's up to sunthin'?

CYRUS

Thur's queer doin's 'round here.

LIL

Thur wuz two plates of eggs missin' offen the pantry shelf, last night.

DAVE

When the Leather Man's 'round—the leaves is cricklin' an' crawlin' in the dark.

LIL

It's jist them night-crawlers, stirrin' 'round under 'em.

DAVE

I tell y', you notice them things sich times.

SNIFFIN

Wears leather, like they say the Injuns used to.

UNCLE KY

All the old people wore leather.—It's strenthenin'.

CYRUS

Thur's Injun in most folks 'round here.

UNCLE KY

Ky-u-ghee is my borned name, fer the Ky-u-ghee Indians. They wore leather.

SNIFFIN

Some say he takes a reg'lar tour through the country.

DAVE

Dressed all in leather?

UNCLE KY

Top to bottom—all leather.

CYRUS

I've heard he's a jumpin' Frenchman—is tuck to travelin' 'round, 'cause he can't stand still.

UNCLE KY

Well, lots has heard him. When he's comin', y' kin tell by the sound.

DAVE

What kind of sound?

UNCLE KY

The leather, y' know, makes a squeakin' sunthin' like the wind in a dead tree.

DAVE

Hey, the butter's half ett! Ma put down a full pail. I seen it.

LIL

Might be a rat.

DAVE

Don't look like a rat done it.

SNIFFIN

How 'd he git in the bucket?

LIL

Probably jumped.

DAVE

Time Gid died, were a card-an'-spin settin' on his piller!

SNIFFIN

Frank 's wore a path to the well with that chair of hers.

DAVE

Yea-a, she don't go nowheres out doors—'ceptin' to the well. [SNIFFIN *approaches the well.*] Thur's snakes down thur.

UNCLE KY

Wuz a corpse in daddy's well, when I wuz a kid. Jim Slivvers it were. He wuz cousin to Fred Pye-att. Both of 'em wuz weak in the wits.

DAVE

How 'd he git in?

UNCLE KY

Nobody knowed. Seems so, must have fell in—ax-cidentally.

DAVE

That wuz a damn fool thing to do.

UNCLE KY

Yes-yes, poor Jim—thought he knew everythin'—lot more'n he did.

SNIFFIN

Can't y' git no cider, Ky?

UNCLE KY

That's a good idee—
[*Exit* UNCLE KY, *down the bulkhead.*]

LIL

Y're plumb scairt, ain't y'?

DAVE

Hell, no! I ain't scairt no more 'n you.

SNIFFIN

Thur's lots of folks is scairt 'round here.

DAVE

Well, now take me—I ain't scairt of no Leather Man. Takes more 'n that to scare me.

CYRUS

Huh!

DAVE

Why, I been huntin' night times, in the alder bushes, down the river, y' know. There's a place, now I tell y'.

Them big snakes—why, three foot long—is restin' up in the branches, an' y' come along—they'll drop *kerspang* an' go streakin'.

SNIFFIN

Kind-a ticklish.

DAVE

Well, I tell y'—you don't want to lean over. No, sir! Git one them down y'ur neck—then y'll wiggle, believe me! [*Something goes "ker-chug," deep in the well.*] What's that?

SNIFFIN

Sunthin' fell—in the well.

LIL

Dave, you ain't gettin' dispep-sia?

DAVE

No—I ain't no fool.

LIL

O, y' ain't?

DAVE

Now, see here, I ain't no fool. Mebby I do drink a little—that's my business. I ain't no fool. I'm wise. Like

one these here owls, I'm wiser 'n y' think they are.

[*The bucket swings. A sound emerges, seemingly from the ground.*]

SOUND

Whoo—whoo-whoo!

SNIFFIN

An owl.

LIL

Whut 's trouble, Dave?

CYRUS

[*At the door.*] In the broad day light!

SNIFFIN

Whur 'd y' think it come from?

CYRUS

Can't tell.

DAVE

Seems like, in thur.

LIL

Ain't no owls in wells.

SNIFFIN

Yea-a—that's what I been thinkin'.

CYRUS

Might of flew in. Wells is dark. Might be good place fer owl.

LIL

Thur ain't nuthin' in owls.

DAVE

Yes thur be. When me an' Ma wuz livin' up back of the ridge, we heard one. She says, "Thur's a change of fortune comin' when them big horned-owls git so clos't." Sure 'nough, she married ag'in 'fore long.

CYRUS

A big horned-owl—might be, might be.

SNIFFIN

Now, y' don't suppose.

DAVE

Ain't nobody got a long pole?

SOUND

Whoo—whoo-whoo!

DAVE

God, thur it goes ag'in!—Hey, Ma!

LIL

Hush up!—An' I wisht the owls would hush, too.

SNIFFIN

Thur wuz a murder here, too—wern't thur?

LIL

My Ma.

DAVE

Hey—Ma!

[*Enter* FRANK.]

SNIFFIN

Nice day.

FRANK

Are you workin' yit—or never?

SNIFFIN

I'm aimin' to run fer a political job.

FRANK

What's got into all ye?

DAVE

I wuz tellin her thur wuz an owl.

LIL

Shut up.

FRANK

What th'—!

DAVE

Ma, thur's an owl in the well.

FRANK

What! Well—you run along an' let it be.

DAVE

But, Ma!

FRANK

I don't want nobody monkeyin' down that well.

[*Some heavy object drops in the well with a hollow*

splash. All listen. There is a further commotion—a clatter, a dashing of things about, and a voice swears.]

VOICE

Damn it!

[*All advance on the well, with mingled feelings.*]

VOICE

Help!

[*The noise increases.* FRANK *approaches the well. Finally,* IRVE, *disguised by the pail, which has fallen over his head, claws his way frantically out of the well.*]

DAVE

[*Retreating backward toward the kitchen.*] Hey! It's comin' out.

SNIFFIN

God, the owl!

[IRVE *paws the bucket off his head.*]

FRANK

The tarnation feathers of Hell is in me—how come you to be in that?

LIL

Irve wus jist tryin' out Dave—to show he 'd no need to be a-feared of the well.

FRANK

Shut up.

IRVE

I slipped—when I heard—I tell y'—

FRANK

I hope y' hang, next time.

IRVE

I didn't do it, Lil!

FRANK

[*Starts for him.*] If I ever git my hands on ye! [IRVE *stumbles backward off the porch.* FRANK *points.*] Thur's the road—an' thur the road stays!

[IRVE *backs off and vanishes.*]

Now I want all you to shet y'ur mouth on this. I don't want 'nother word out of any of y'. Hear me, Sniffin?—Not to no one. An' don't none of y' go set on a barrel, down to Chappy's store, an' shoot y'ur

mouth 'bout this. I'll hear it, if y' do—an' God help y'. If y' want to talk, do it to me. Thur ain't nuthin' down that well—nor thur ain't nuthin' in them woods.

[*The cover lifts off the bulkhead.*]

UNCLE KY

[*Emerging.*] What's all the dis-tubbance?

FRANK

What y' see an' no more. Now git the hell out of here—all of y'.

[*Exeunt all but* FRANK.

FRANK *looks all around. Then goes toward the well. As she approaches it, the* LEATHER MAN *emerges, puts his clasped hands to his mouth and hoots like an owl.*]

LEATHER MAN

Whooo—! [*He chuckles low.*]

FRANK

Quit y'ur prankin'—y' deserter!

LEATHER MAN

I ain't never desertin' you, Frank. Mebby I go wand'rin'—when the wind is wailin' lonesome—you kin

think how it'll still be whistlin' an' whisperin'—all over the thickets—after y' re dead an' gone. Them times, it tempts me. It tempts me out onto the hills in the night time—listenin' an' listenin', whiles I kin. But I ain't desertin' you.

FRANK

Y're a queer man—fer a woman like me. You wand'rin' fool!

LEATHER MAN

I loves like a fool—yea-a—autumn times I go courtin' the hills. I got a wishfullness to make my marriage bed with the stars—an' burrer into the bed of the autumn leaves—warm an' hot with the breathin' of the earth—when the nights is nippin' cold under the frost, an' only the quiltin' of the leaves has laid up the heat of the sun —to wait till to-morrer. . . . But it'll break y'ur heart —the beauty of the world will break it. And it's cold, driftin' into winter. I got to have *you*, Frank.

FRANK

An' me?

LEATHER MAN

Y're like the Holler itself. When a man 's with y', he don't fear nuthin', ner wish fer more—ceptin'—jist be —an' sleep——an' stren'then.

FRANK

Till y' kin travel away ag'in.

LEATHER MAN

Things is turn an' turn about. The flesh is good—to keep the heart from breakin'. Seems like I'd do most anythin' fer y', Frank.

FRANK

Shut y'ur mouth! Git down.

[LIL *is heard coming. The* LEATHER MAN *goes down the well. Enter* LIL.]

FRANK

Lil, this rumpus wuz your doin'. You an' me 's got a date comin'. Git back to y'ur washin'.

[CYRUS *appears.*]

LIL

Pa, I'm leavin'. When she gits that way—

CYRUS

Don't git thinkin', Lil.

LIL

Sometimes, seems like I'd most break apart, fer wantin' to git out—an' that feller, Irve.

CYRUS

What about him?

LIL

Seems like he spoke jist what I been wantin' to hear. He didn't mean nuthin' by that well trick. He's givin' me my chanc't, Pa.

CYRUS

Chanc' to break y'ur engagement promise.

LIL

But he wuz tellin'—

CYRUS

Thur's a matter of puss'nal taste in what y' listen to, Lil. You're an engaged woman. Don't fergit that.

LIL

He'll marry me an' take me out—an' he's smart.

CYRUS

I reckon he ain't goin' to out-smart the Lord yit a while.

LIL

I'm goin', Pa.

CYRUS

Says he'll marry y'. Might be better 'n stayin' here with Dave an' Frank. 'Nother winter comin'. The place ain't what it used to be—an' then Frank ain't y'ur mother, an Dave ain't stiddy. Still y're leavin'?

LIL

Yes, Pa.

CYRUS

We allus wuz here—y'ur Ma an' my Ma. My Ma wern't never married, Lil. She liked the place. Had two kids, me an' Lou. Guess they wouldn't allow it now 'days. But she wuz allus wantin' someone— Yes— mebby it's best y' go. Mebby it is. I ain't keepin' y', Lil.

LIL

I'd not hate goin', 'cept fer leavin' you—alone by y'self—what y' told me about the place an' all.

CYRUS

I like to talk to y', Lil, I do.

[*Enter* IRVE, *up right.* LIL *and* IRVE *run together and embrace.*]

IRVE

That owl wasn't—

LIL

I'm comin'. Meet y', back of the barn.

[FRANK *appears at the door.*]

FRANK

Y' damned yaller snake! Didn't I tell y' to keep off my Lil? What the hell do y' mean? Git out! An' if I see y' ag'in', I'll print lace patterns on y'ur hide with a shot gun. Git inside, Lil. I'm 'shamed of y'.

IRVE

I guess I've as much right here as any man.

LIL

Ssh!

FRANK

Well—y'll think diff'rent in a minute. Hey, Dave, come here with my shot gun! Irve's runnin' off with y'ur engaged wife. Git in thur, Lil.

LIL

I—I won't.

FRANK

You an' me's had it out before, ain't we?

LIL

Yea-a.

FRANK

You know me. Git in thur—or y'll wish y' wuz dead. [*Exit* LIL *into the house.*] Shut y'ur trap, young man. [*Enter* DAVE *with the gun.*] Here, Dave—git a shell in.

CYRUS

No, Ma!

FRANK

Load it up—if y' kin see fer y'ur collar.

CYRUS

You better go, Irve.

FRANK

If he goes, foller him, Dave. He come stealin' y'ur Lil.

CYRUS

Y' better go.

[IRVE *goes, followed by* DAVE. DAVE *pauses, up right.*]

DAVE

An' if y' come back, you'll git it, both barrels, stranger.

FRANK

Good doin', Dave!

DAVE

An' he comes back—he'll be as welcome as a tax collector.

FRANK

An' git the same.

CYRUS

Y' be careful with that gun, Dave.

DAVE

Don't tell me nuthin' about no gun, old man. A gun is one thing I do know.

FRANK

Give me a hand, Dave. I'm all shook up with the anger.

CYRUS

Thur's a piece got knocked offen the well, Dave. Wish't y' d mend it. I ain't so good as I wuz liftin' them big stone.

DAVE

I got to git over to Eddy's—th're fixin fer a frolic to-night. I'll do it to-morrer.

[FRANK *and* DAVE *go into the house.* LIL *steals in from the left, with a bundle.*]

LIL

He said he 'd wait fer me to the barn. I ain't goin' to stay 'nother minute.

CYRUS

How 'll y' git to the rail road? Y' better take the hoss.

LIL

Thanks, Pa.

CYRUS

Don't y' need no things? Ain't y' got nuthin' more 'n that?

LIL

I'm savin' space fer a weddin' dress Irve 'll git me. [IRVE *enters, stealthily.*] O Irve! [*She joins* IRVE.]

CYRUS

Git yourself a bunnet. [*Exit* LIL, *into the house.*] You'll marry her—sure enough?

IRVE

Yes.

CYRUS

You better.

IRVE

I aim to.

CYRUS

She's worth all y' got an' more. No man ain't half good enough fer my Lil. [*In changed tone.*] Y'll take the horse an' buggy. Better go git hitched.

[IRVE *leaves, up right.* CYRUS *turns away toward the door. Enter* LIL *from the house.*]

LIL

I got enough stuff, Pa. Frank 's comin' round herself ag'in.

CYRUS

I'll manage her. Irve 's hitchin' up. I'll listen fer y', crossin' the bridge. I'll hear the boards clatter.

LIL

Seems like I can't go.

CYRUS

Lil, my little baby.

[*The* LEATHER MAN *emerges from the well.* LIL *sees him.* CYRUS *does not.* FRANK *is heard approaching.*]

LIL

Stop her, Pa.

CYRUS

Come back a-fore too long.

[CYRUS *goes into the house.*]

LIL

Leather Man?

LEATHER MAN

I heard y', an' I know y'. I know what y're wantin', an' you'll find it, mebby, only don't be skeered of nuthin'. Lil, y' ain't got no Pa. Y're a seedlin' what wuz overshaddered, when y' wuz borned. Mebby y'll take root out yonder—in the sun. Me an' Frank 's goin' to have a time.

LIL

What 's Frank to you?

LEATHER MAN

She's some like hell fire, she is. Her an' me can't keep apart—but that ain't none of your business.—Good-by.

LIL

Good-by—Leather Man.

[*Exit* LIL.]

FRANK

[*Off stage—inside.*] Git out my way, Cyrus. [*The* LEATHER MAN *crouches.* CYRUS *and* FRANK *come out.*] Whur 's Lil?

CYRUS

Sommers 'round.

FRANK

Whur?

CYRUS

I wanted she should fetch me my scythe snaith. I left it hangin' in the branch of the apple tree by the barn.

FRANK

Shut up, old turtle! She'll be back—an' I 'll be ready fer her.

[FRANK *sees the* LEATHER MAN.]

CYRUS

Mebby she will—mebby she won't.

FRANK

What's that?

CYRUS

I wuz jist gettin' lonesome.

FRANK

Go git Lil. Go git her—go 'long. [*Exit* CYRUS. FRANK *speaks to the* LEATHER MAN.] What brought *you* up? [*There is a rumble of wheels going over a bridge, off, up stage right.*] Is that Lil—an' Irve? You done it. You helped her sneak off?

LEATHER MAN

I jest give Lil her chanc't.

FRANK

Y'll hang fer this.

LEATHER MAN

Frank, I want y'! Ain't I your husband?

FRANK

Yea-a, but I never see the man yit, I couldn't cut his throat if I tuck a mind to.

[*She starts in, but stops to listen to the* LEATHER MAN.]

LEATHER MAN

Frank, I can't lose y'. Back in the ridges, when the wind is blowin', it's like the dark wuz callin' "Honey Holler!"—wrappin' itself around me—hissin' the sand—an' callin' [*He cups his hands and calls*]: "Frank!"—Put thur ain't no Frank, out thur.

FRANK

Y'll hang fer killin' Sarah. I'll tell 'em everythin'. [*She goes in.*]

LEATHER MAN

Goin' to git y'ur gun? Well, I guess I'll go, too.

[*Exit the* LEATHER MAN, *up right, over wall. Enter* FRANK, *with gun. The* LEATHER MAN *is gone.* FRANK *fires the gun after him.*]

FRANK

[*Calling.*] Hey, Ky!—Dave!

Curtain

Act Two

The Scene is the same as Act One, seven years later.

No repair work whatsoever has been done in the meantime. The putty is out of the window sashes. The glass panes are held in by pins. Some panes are cracked; others entirely missing, or replaced by cardboard, broken shingles and sacking. Clapboards are off the house, particularly about the sills, which are rotted and sagging.

The corner of the barn is half collapsed. Weeds and rubbish fight for supremacy wherever the earth has not been packed down by feet. The rose bush is untrimmed and large. The chopping block is worn down to a stub. Even the well looks more decrepit and is still unpatched. The tree, at right, is gone; there is no wash tub, and the rough table which used to support it has vanished.

As the curtain rises, DAVE *is "resting" on the porch, with both feet propped against a mouldering stud which supports the porch roof.*

Enter UNCLE KY, *with an armful of tall green herbs.*

DAVE

Y' look like a walkin' forest.

UNCLE KY

Yea-a, it's bone-set.

DAVE

Ain't no use till it's dried.

UNCLE KY

Frank 's got some I gathered last year, steepin' fer me on the stove since yistiddy noon. I jist got her this fer a new stock. Every year I feel worse—an' this is the seventh since Lil run off.

DAVE

Yea-a, hull seven years. That bone-set's a med'cine.

UNCLE KY

Yea-a. I ain't feelin' so good. Got sore toe.

DAVE

Is it broke?

UNCLE KY

Well, I hit it against the door stone, ax-cidentally. I don't think it's broke—but I got that bone-set stewin'.

[*Enter* CYRUS, *leaning heavily on two canes.*]

DAVE

Watch out, Cyrus! Y're blind as a bat.

CYRUS

Wish't Lil wuz here.

DAVE

Me, too. She used to tend the chores good. If y' had that five dollars Irve stole—y' could go to a doctor.

UNCLE KY

Bone-set beats all doctors. Don't it, Cyrus?

CYRUS

Yea-a. Bile it down, make tea of it.

UNCLE KY

I seen my Daddy put up a bunch of it—why—as big 'round as a plate. Breaks up a cold—all sich things.

FRANK

[*From inside the house.*] Hey, Dave!—Time to milk an' turn out the cows. Git stirrin'.

DAVE

Jis' soon's it gits cool, Ma.

CYRUS

I kin do it. I kin milk yit.

FRANK

[*Appearing in the doorway.*] The three of ye wouldn't make a hull man. I seen the time I'd strip down two cows in five minutes—an' them fresh three weeks from calvin'. But, now—huh! I ain't left this chair in seven years.

CYRUS

Y've wore off the furrard legs of it, scrapin' it around an' hitchin' of it. I wuz feelin' of it—t' other day.

FRANK

Yea-a, the torment 's ketched me, since Lil run off.

CYRUS

Dave 's stayin'.

FRANK

He's smarter 'n any ever run off.

CYRUS

It's seven year, an' he ain't fixed the edge of that well yit.

FRANK

Nor Lil ain't fetched y'ur scythe snaith, neither!

CYRUS

Comin' to drive the cows, Dave?

DAVE

Sure, sure. I'll be right along. The bars is down an' the pails is waitin'. Y' won't hev to drive 'em none.

[*Exit* CYRUS, *up right.*]

FRANK

Y' lost Lil. Y' d ought to do sunthin' to earn y'ur keep. I dunno what'll come of ye.

[*Exit* FRANK, *into house.*]

DAVE

Ma ain't herself, since Lil run off. She's afeared Cyrus 'll do me out the farm in his will.

UNCLE KY

Well, Lil's gone.

DAVE

Yea-a, I ain't worryin'.

UNCLE KY

[*Standing, hitches his thumb toward the house.*] She don't hev no use fer men nor likker, like she used to.

DAVE

No.

UNCLE KY

This chain could hang my bone-set. It's most rusted

off. [*He picks up the end of a rusty length of chain, down stage right.*] 'T wuz hitched to old Blue, warn't it?

DAVE

Yea-a, Blue wuz a good dog, 'fore he run off. Y' know, that dog liked to go huntin' in clear weather—sky-blue.

UNCLE KY

Never come back—after he run off.

DAVE

No. Leave it lay—y' can't break it.

[UNCLE KY *drops the chain. There is a noise of wheels. He listens.*]

DAVE

If thur ain't a team! [*He rises.*] It's Eddy.

UNCLE KY

He wuz goin' to Visty fer cider.

DAVE

Thur's a woman with him.

VOICE

[*Outside.*] Hey, Dave! Here's Lil. I can't get through the mud hole.

DAVE

It's Lil.

[DAVE *and* UNCLE KY *go off, up right. As they go, the figure of the* LEATHER MAN *rises from where he has been concealed behind some bushes by the bit of stone wall, up right. He looks off after* DAVE *and* UNCLE KY *and listens. Then he comes down, right. He wears a long tattered cloak or rain coat, which he removes and rolls up in a ball, putting it under one arm. He picks up the length of rusty chain.*]

LEATHER MAN

So, y' never come back. Blue, you wuz huntin' to the end.

[*He puts the chain down gently. Glancing back, up right, over his shoulder, as he listens to the noise of the team and people off stage, he goes to the well and swings one leg over its edge—when a commanding voice stops him.*]

FRANK

[*In the doorway.*] Turn 'round here, Joe!

LEATHER MAN

Frank, I come back. Life's short to be holdin' a grudge.

FRANK

Y' stay, y'll hang.

LEATHER MAN

Y' ain't changed y'ur mind?

FRANK

No.

LEATHER MAN

Even suppose Lil should come back?

FRANK

Whether she ever comes or not. What you need is hell fire.

LEATHER MAN

That's right, Frank, an' hell fire is you. I need you.

FRANK

You an' y'ur Pa wuz a couple of lily-livered preachers.

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, but old hell fire wuz all the comfort me an' Daddy ever got out of religion—only he 'd never admit it.

FRANK

Hnn-nr-rrr!

LEATHER MAN

All the rest wuz like tryin' to sleep under half a bed kivver with Christ—in a north wind. [*He slips down the well.*]

[FRANK, *hearing the approach of persons outside, draws back into partial concealment.*

Enter LIL, *followed by* DAVE *and* UNCLE KY.]

LIL

Whur's the pear tree?

DAVE

[*Pointing off.*] That stump thur, by that hen.

LIL

Things change—but it's still Honey Holler. Jis' think, Ky, I ain't smelled cow in seven years.

UNCLE KY

I reckon the smell ain't changed none, Lil.

DAVE

Whur's Irve?

LIL

He left me.

DAVE

He left y'?

LIL

Well, he didn't come back—nor I didn't hear from him. I reckon he got tired of me, an' went some new place.

[FRANK *comes forward.*]

FRANK

Y' don't say?

LIL

Hello, Ma.

FRANK

Hello, Lil.

LIL

I come home.

FRANK

Whur is he?

LIL

Gone into the western states.

FRANK

I hope he rots thur, the thief.

LIL

What d' he steal?

FRANK

He stole off Uncle Ky—one five-dollar gold piece.

LIL

I'll make it up to him.

FRANK

Y'll make up fer y'ur philandrin'—by workin'.

LIL

I see thur's plenty to do.

FRANK

Well, I see y' ain't got on, no place else.

LIL

I had idee, mebby, I could find the Leather Man.

FRANK

Oooo! Hum! [*She looks at the well and then at* LIL.]

UNCLE KY

Chappy thought he seed the Leather Man t'other night. He tuck his shot gun—an pow!—But it wuz jist only Gid's white-face cow,—only he missed her.

DAVE

Chappy 'd miss anythin'.

UNCLE KY

Keepin' store has dimmed his sight.

FRANK

[*To* LIL.] Come—come!

[*Exit* FRANK, *into the house.*]

LIL

How's Pa?

DAVE

Still drivin' his hosses.

LIL

Them canes?

DAVE

Yea-a, reg'lar. An Frank's tuck complete in the legs. Y'll ketch hell from her.

LIL

Yea-a, I reckon.

FRANK

[*At the door.*] Come inside, Lil! Thur's a bucket of swill fer y' to take to the hogs. [*Exit* LIL, *into the house.*] Ky, come git y'ur bone-set. I'm sick of lookin' at it. [*She holds out a squat bottle.*] I put it in a whiskey bottle fer ye. Thought it might be easier takin'.

UNCLE KY

[*Taking the bottle.*] Are y' sure it's cooked good?

FRANK

Yea-a. Thur's 'nough to tan a calf.

[*Exit* FRANK, *into the house.*]

DAVE

Looks black.

UNCLE KY

[*Preparing to take the dose.*] 'Cause it's strong. God-awful bitter! [*He shuns the bottle.*] When it's cool, it ain't so bad. [*He has an idea.*] I'm goin' to put it down the well to cool.

[*He goes to the well and begins to let the bottle down on one of the strings fastened there for such purpose.*]

DAVE

[*Who has come over to observe.*] It's a shame to put that stuff in a whiskey bottle. Might deceive y'.

UNCLE KY

Looks like likker, but it don't act so.

[THE TWO MEN *walk back together to the porch.*]

DAVE

I never tuck to med'cine.

UNCLE KY

Takes a strong man to sample bone-set.

[*Both sit again.*]

DAVE

Well, she's back.

UNCLE KY

Looks skinny.

DAVE

Yea-a, the wild life don't 'pear to agree with her.

UNCLE KY

She made a mistake in goin'.

DAVE

Well, tuck her seven year to admit it.

FRANK

[*From inside.*] Take them two pails an' go slop the hogs.

LIL

[*Coming out, with two pails.*] Seems like all the shiftlessness an' vanity an' drinkin' of men had to be made up fer—out of pain an' laborin'.

DAVE

Y' ain't speakin' of *us?*

LIL

Ain't I? Y'd jist lay right down side of work, both of y'—put the job on the Lord. Let God do it—an' thur ain't no God.

FRANK

[*At the window.*] Let the women do it, y' mean.

UNCLE KY

[*Earnestly, like a preacher.*] My Daddy was a minister—an' *he* blamed it on the *Lord.*

[*Exit* LIL, *off left, with pails.*]

DAVE

Like old times—ain't it?

UNCLE KY

Yes-yes.

DAVE

Day like to-day, I like to rest my feet.

UNCLE KY

That's one thing you got's—a beautiful pair of feet.

DAVE

My Daddy—your brother Joe—he had a good pair of feet.

UNCLE KY

He did. The Injun breedin' showed in his feet. Joe could allus walk when he wuz a mind to.

DAVE

[*Soberly.*] Feet never hurt him?

UNCLE KY

Well, not walkin'—but Joe's feet 'd hurt him, when he wuz preachin'.

DAVE

Preachin'?

UNCLE KY

Yea-a, them hot days. 'Course, he 'd hev to stand up to preach.

DAVE

Yea-a—can't preach, settin'.

UNCLE KY

Y' see—toward the end of summer—his shoes would git warped up at the ends. Folks said the sun done it, 'cause he didn't use 'em 'nough. Then when he 'd stand up—he 'd cuss.

DAVE

Right in the pull-pit?

UNCLE KY

Yea-a.

DAVE

'Course he didn't mean nuthin'.

UNCLE KY

No, he jist had to say sunthin'.

DAVE

Sure.

UNCLE KY

Sure.

DAVE

God! [*He jumps up.*] Somebody 'd ought to fix this chair. Y' can't lean back without it pinches y'.

UNCLE KY

Reckon I'll cool my toe. [*He takes off his sock.*]

DAVE

[*Disgusted at not receiving any sympathy.*] Huh!

[*Exit* DAVE, *into the house. There is a pause, while* UNCLE KY *examines his toe. He makes much of the point that he can't bear his weight on it. Suddenly a commotion is heard in the well, followed by deep hollow coughing. The* LEATHER MAN *emerges, with convulsive movements.* UNCLE KY, *aroused, treads nimbly on his toe and shouts.*]

UNCLE KY

Hey, Dave, Frank!—Hey!

[*The* LEATHER MAN *leaps after* UNCLE KY, *whom he seizes by the neck and then swathes in the old patched quilt that he jerks from where it has been sunning in the window.* UNCLE KY'S *cries are muffled. He sits violently. The* LEATHER MAN *is seized with a fit of coughing and has to release him.* UNCLE KY *peeks fearfully out of the quilt.*]

UNCLE KY

God-a-mercy!

LEATHER MAN

Ssst!

UNCLE KY

God, if it ain't my brother Joe, what died!

LEATHER MAN

SSST!—O! Goddy—Ky—git me some water!

UNCLE KY

Water?

LEATHER MAN

Water!

UNCLE KY

[*Having helped provide some water.*] No corpse wants water. You ain't a spirit.

LEATHER MAN

Sst! Dave'll hear y'. My Goddy! I thought that boneset wuz a new brand of whiskey!

UNCLE KY

Glory be! It's a remedy.

LEATHER MAN

It is. Ky, brother—I ain't had a dose of that boneset since Pa preached his last sermon, an' left me to home with the colic.

UNCLE KY

An' jist to think, you bein' here all the time.—Lil's lookin' fer y'.

LEATHER MAN

She hadn't ought to, Ky. Lil hadn't ought to come back.

UNCLE KY

Huh?

LEATHER MAN

She's givin' up everythin'.

UNCLE KY

She'll git the farm, I reckon. Do y' live down thur, with them red adders an' frogs?

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, the leather keeps 'em off along with the damp. Thur's quite a room in the side, whur Gran' Uncle Turner kep' his rum.

UNCLE KY

Rum?

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, goes clear under, deeper 'n the cellar to the house—warm an' cozy. Thur's enough rum to last till the Day of Jedgment.

UNCLE KY

Y' don't say.

LEATHER MAN

Don't be goin' down. The snakes 'll git ye.

UNCLE KY

[*Simply.*] I could git me a leather dress.

LEATHER MAN

[*Charitably offering his flask.*] Hev some of mine. It's most one hunnert years old.

UNCLE KY

Bet thur ain't none other like it—fer stren'th.

LEATHER MAN

It's strong.

UNCLE KY

It's phee-nominal. So y' left preachin' fer likker?

LEATHER MAN

Well, partly only.—Frank wern't built fer religion nuther.

UNCLE KY

I never did understand you before.

LEATHER MAN

I can't help it.

UNCLE KY

Me, nuther.

LEATHER MAN

I hev to keep travelin'.

UNCLE KY

Y' can't take the likker with y'.

LEATHER MAN

No. Likker don't amount to whut's botherin' me.

UNCLE KY

Whut wuz it?

LEATHER MAN

I'd like to tell y', Ky.

UNCLE KY

I'd like to know!

LEATHER MAN

It wuz murder give me my start.

UNCLE KY

Huh!

LEATHER MAN

It wuz me murdered Sarah.

UNCLE KY

Yea-a?—Well—y' don't say!

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, I been hidin'—seein' the world.

UNCLE KY

[*Offering a return drink.*] Hev a little.

LEATHER MAN

No. An' Lil went out—but come back. She 'd ought to hev sunthin' would drive her out.

UNCLE KY

Joe.

LEATHER MAN

Yes, Ky.

UNCLE KY

Now I think of it—your life don't 'mount to a straw, 'round here. It don't amount to a straw—not a straw!

LEATHER MAN

Y're a comfort to hev fer a brother, Ky. You an' me an' all the children of Adam is like thur Pa an' Ma.

UNCLE KY

Huh?

LEATHER MAN

They don't 'preciate the garden of Eden—without the Lord gits a'ter 'em with a fiery sword. Here's Dave. I'll illustrate my text fer y'.

[*The* LEATHER MAN *slips down the well. Enter* DAVE *from the house.* UNCLE KY *conceals the bottle.*]

UNCLE KY

Kind-a muggy, ain't it?

[*The well rope begins to swing, behind* KY.]

DAVE

Hey, look!

UNCLE KY

I don't see nuthin'.

DAVE

Look it!

[*The rope swings dangerously near* KY, *who ignores it.*]

UNCLE KY

Look at what?

DAVE

Git away from it, Ky! [*The rope gives a vicious snap, like a whip.*] Jeeminy God!

[DAVE *dashes off, around the house.*]

LEATHER MAN

[*Emerging from the well.*] It smartens him up beyant all belief—a little smell of the Devil.

UNCLE KY

Yes-yes—so long's he don't smell the rum. He might be back.

LEATHER MAN

Well, I tell y', Ky; folks don't use thur eyes, 'less they're scairt. They don't none of 'em see the temptation an' sadness of the wind-shadders pressin' in the wavey grass. Thur's enj'yment watchin' the caperin' of the lightnin' bugs—an' in follerin' the course of sundown, an' moon rise—splashin' light on the leaf-carpet under the towerin' trees. That leaf-carpet is like a dance floor, fer the deep forest seedlin's—them little sorrerful seedlin's, what'll never grow up—'cause thur own kin, that borned 'em, overshadders 'em.

UNCLE KY

I see Dave comin' 'round the outside of the house with a shot-gun.

LEATHER MAN

I got to git goin'.

UNCLE KY

Y' got time yit. He ain't *sure* he's *comin'*.

LEATHER MAN

Huh! He ain't no surer 'n I be—'bout Lil.

UNCLE KY

Thur's one thing bothers me, Joe.—Ain't Frank a big-mist?

LEATHER MAN

Not so long 's I'm a corpse.

UNCLE KY

Don't Cyrus bother y'?

LEATHER MAN

Well, Ky, I look at it philosophical.—Cyrus an' me is skim-milk to butter.—I git the good of it.

UNCLE KY

'T ain't nat'chull.

DAVE

[*Calling from outside.*] Hey, Ky!

UNCLE KY

[*Deeply moved, physically and mentally, by this "parting of the ways."*] Whut about that rum?

LEATHER MAN

Jist whistle *Annie Laurie*. [*He whistles.*] When y' let the bucket down—I'll send y' up a potion, any time. [*Exit the* LEATHER MAN, *down the well.*]

[UNCLE KY *moves away from the well, slightly unsteady, whistling low—experimentally. Enter* DAVE, *from around the house.*]

DAVE

Did y' see that well-rope?

UNCLE KY

Huh!

DAVE

You wuz wigglin' of it!

UNCLE KY

My bone-set got snagged. I jist—I jist drunk off that potion of bone-set.

DAVE

[*Smelling the bottle.*] Hum!

UNCLE KY

The sun certainly is hot, to-day.

DAVE

Whiskey.

UNCLE KY

It were about this time of year my Daddy died.

DAVE

Y' can't skeer me no more.

UNCLE KY

Poor Daddy! He had pneumo-nia, they called it. He wuz strong, too.

[*Holding the bottle,* DAVE *goes over to the well and starts to look down.*]

UNCLE KY

Reminds me of Jim Slivvers.

DAVE

Huh?

UNCLE KY

After he fell in the well.

DAVE

[*Drawing back.*] Yea-a?

UNCLE KY

Likker couldn't help him.

DAVE

Y' needn't think you kin skeer me. I seen through y'. Thur ain't no bone-set 'tween you an' Frank. I suspicioned that bottle. Y' druv me off, so's y' could drink the hull of it by yourself.

UNCLE KY

Kind-a muggy.—The sun is leavin' us. Goin' to be less light from now on.

DAVE

God, Ky!—Y' give me the creeps. [*He starts off, right.*]

UNCLE KY

Are y' goin' to Eddy's?

[DAVE *does not answer, but marches off.*]

UNCLE KY

Huh!

[UNCLE KY *hiccoughs, picks up the quilt and goes*

into the house. For a moment, the stage is empty. Then CYRUS *comes on, from up right, with two pails of milk. It is hard work for him to carry the pails. He rests often and uses his canes to help support the weight of the pails. Enter* LIL, *with her buckets, from left. She puts them away and suddenly sees* CYRUS.]

LIL

Pa.

CYRUS

What's that? Who is it?

LIL

It's Lil, Pa. I come back to see y'. Holt still, Pa.

CYRUS

Lil, sure 'nough.

LIL

Yes, Pa. Y're plumb blinded!

CYRUS

'T ain't no matter. Be y' all right?

LIL

Y' might say.

CYRUS

Whur's Irve?

LIL

He left me, Pa.

CYRUS

Left y'?

LIL

Yea-a. I staid an' waited. I wuz lonesome, Pa—I—and y' see—

CYRUS

Did he git y' in a family way?

LIL

I lost one, but thur's one a-comin'.

CYRUS

Damn him!

LIL

Sst, Pa. He don't know it. I come away without tellin' him. But he wouldn't want it.—We wuz holdin' him back.

CYRUS

Helt him back from thievin', y' mean. But the next 'll comfort y'.

LIL

Mebby, Pa. It's awful puzzlin'. Mebby thur ain't nuthin' 'cept vanity, Pa.

CYRUS

Y' kin work.

LIL

A man kin work fer to-morrer—but a woman like me—what work hev I got? I'll be tendin' the chores.

FRANK

[*Appearing at the door of the milk room, up left.*] Rinse out them hog pails, Lil. Cyrus, can't y' help me, a cripple?

CYRUS

Sorry, Frank.

FRANK

Yea-a, me a cripple, an' y' hate me.

CYRUS

I don't hate y', Frank. I like to do what I kin. I built up the place—an' I can't hate nuthin' 'bout it. Not even you, Frank.

FRANK

Y' allus wuz soft.

CYRUS

Lil, Lil—I can't see y'.

FRANK

Cyrus, take y'ur milk inside a-fore y' spill it.

[LIL *helps* CYRUS *inside with the milk.* FRANK *goes in and appears at the door, center, with some food.*]

LIL

Come, Pa.—You an' me we're goin' to talk, like we used to.

FRANK

[*From indoors, speaking to* CYRUS *and* LIL.] Take y'ur jawin' out front. I'll spare y' a minute.

CYRUS

[*Inside.*] Thank y', Frank, thank y'.

[FRANK *comes out, looks all about, and goes to the well.*]

FRANK

Joe!—Joe!

[*The* LEATHER MAN *appears.*]

LEATHER MAN

God, Frank—it takes courage to answer y'. [*Seeing the food.*] Fer me?

FRANK

Yea-a.

LEATHER MAN

God, Frank!—I ain't hungry.

FRANK

It ain't pizen. I got a use fer y'.

LEATHER MAN

Whew!

[*The* LEATHER MAN *takes a bite, ravenously.*]

FRANK

Lil bein' back, I reckon we kin git her spliced to Dave now.

LEATHER MAN

Irve ain't dead.

FRANK

No, too bad, ain't it?

LEATHER MAN

Don't pester me, Frank. I been all wrapped up in dreams of glory.

FRANK

Hum!

LEATHER MAN

Well, some.—I even had thoughts agin violence an' murder.

FRANK

Thoughts agin murder rises on the wind of a empty stomach. Don't never despize my victuals.

LEATHER MAN

I don't, when I git 'em.

FRANK

Y'll git 'em from now on.

LEATHER MAN

Them eats is temptin' as the devil. I wuz godly, but them eats has lured me to—bein' yourn—fer better or worse.

FRANK

A full stomach brings sense to a empty head. Y' ain't grateful. Warn't it me shielded y', after y' killt Sarah? Takin' on old Two-Canes warn't no picnic fer me. But me marryin' ag'in wuz pretty sure proof you wuz dead —an' no use huntin' fur y'! Besides I give out word you died, day before Sarah.

LEATHER MAN

That wuz smart.

DAVE

It wuz. Now, y' kin help me git Dave an' Lil jined—by puttin' Irve out of the way.

LEATHER MAN

God, this table 's sprung a leak right over me.

FRANK

Don't slop y'ur victuals.

LEATHER MAN

I ain't so casu'l, as you be, 'bout murderin' my neebers.

FRANK

Supposin' Irve wuz out the way?

LEATHER MAN

But he ain't.

FRANK

Supposin' he wuz?

LEATHER MAN

Frank, don't y' see y' can't do it. You can't chose fer Lil. It's like a river: each life is a-comin' an' a-turnin' an' liftin' an' going'—an' y' can't check it, nor turn it—like the flood wuz goin' down to the sea—a-seekin' its own way.

FRANK

It ain't my way.

LEATHER MAN

No, y're a rock of a woman, Frank.

FRANK

Why be y' agin this marryin'? What ails y'?

LEATHER MAN

Nuthin'.

FRANK

Nuthin'?

LEATHER MAN

Mebby y' don't know all thur wuz 'tween me an' Sarah.

FRANK

So—what was it? Y' ain't a-feared to tell?

LEATHER MAN

No.

FRANK

Well?

LEATHER MAN

Y' see, Frank, Lil an' Dave can't rightly marry.

FRANK

'Cause why?

LEATHER MAN

'Cause they both got the same Pa.

FRANK

Y' mean?

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a—me.

FRANK

Y' mean Lil's . . . ?

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, Lil's mine.

FRANK

Hum!

LEATHER MAN

I wuz the one got Sarah in trouble.

FRANK

I might of known it. Men is weak.

LEATHER MAN

Lil's my own.

FRANK

So, that's what got into y'! I've had my suspicions of y' an' y'ur wand'rin' ways. Comin' back here to me an' makin' out like I wuz the only woman y' ever shined an eye at.

LEATHER MAN

[*With a sort of lonely thoughtfulness.*] It wuz a long time ago.

FRANK

Yea-a, an' y' ain't fergot it.

LEATHER MAN

[*Holding up his hand.*] Thur's a card-an'-spin— Hear him?—No. I ain't fergot it. I been regrettin' cuttin' Sarah off.

FRANK

It wuz the best thing y' ever done.

LEATHER MAN

Sarah 'd use to 'preciate things. Seems like I cut her off a-fore she wuz done livin'. Folks really oughtn't die, tell they deserve it.

FRANK

She deserved it.

LEATHER MAN

I ain't so sure as I wuz onc't. I ain't never told y' how it started, have I?

FRANK

No.

LEATHER MAN

Did y' ever mind the cows, drinkin' at night—standin' knee-high in the grass of the brook bottom—raisin' thur heads slow—an' rollin' thur big eyes, bulgy—an' th' water runnin' back out of the mouths of them, sloppin'—like fer a moment it understood all the difference an' the story of time—'tween it, an' the belly of a cow—an' it were goin' back to its own—laughin' at both of 'em, an 'achin' an' dancin' fer both of 'em?

FRANK

Yea-a.

LEATHER MAN

I come down by the brook, yonder—an' she wuz waterin' the red cow, an' I says to her:

"Sarah, ain't the cow comical, droolin' her mouth?"

"Yea-a," says she, "ain't she pretty, wagglin' them ears with the flies on 'em, an' wonderin'?"

An' we stood thur—the three of us—starin' off into the dark of the standin' trees—and the card-an'-spins all tunin', and an owl hootin' . . . That's when I tuck her.

FRANK

I reckon.

LEATHER MAN

After that, she went back on me. Claimed bein' married to Cyrus—wouldn't see me no more.

FRANK

She did?

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a.—Y' see, Frank—both my women—Cyrus has got 'em—both.

FRANK

Things ain't what they 'pear to be. He ain't got everythin'.

LEATHER MAN

Y' mean?

FRANK

I'd of follered y', wuz y' the devil, Joe.

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, reckon y' would.

FRANK

Bein' kin ain't nuthin'. Not in Honey Holler it ain't.

LEATHER MAN

Daddy were agin it. I heard him preach agin it.

FRANK

He wuz bookish.

[CYRUS *appears at the door, unseen by* FRANK *or the* LEATHER MAN. *He overhears their conversation and is gradually driven into a fury by what it reveals to him.*]

Don't let it fret y', Joe. You an' me, Joe, thur's life twixt us—you an' me.

LEATHER MAN

An' death. I can't fergit it wuz me killt Sarah.

FRANK

Death's common to all. Don't I feed y', an' rest y'? An' ain't I wife to y'? What's closter 'n one body to another? Ain't I y'ur hope of salvation, this side hell fire?

LEATHER MAN

Reckon y're all I got.

FRANK

Ain't thur rest an' sleepin' here—an' stren'th to build the guts into y'? Ain't you the Leather Man, Joe—an' ain't I lonesome without y'?

LEATHER MAN

Be y'?

FRANK

Ain't I your woman?

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, Frank, y' be.

FRANK

Would y' fail me in the nourishin' of the child I bore y'? Cyrus can't see Dave at all, fer Lil. She 'll git the farm.

LEATHER MAN

What y' mean?

FRANK

Would y' blast the fruits sprung from us? Would y' pitch out Dave to go walkin' hungry an' homeless—fer the sake of a thievin', no account, mangey rascal—what tuck Lil an'—

LEATHER MAN

I'll give Dave his chanc't.

FRANK

By puttin' Lil free of Irve!

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, free of Irve, but I'll only do it—jist fer one thing—that I kin do myself.

FRANK

What?

LEATHER MAN

I'm a minister, an' I'm her Pa—an' I'm goin' to marry them myself.

FRANK

Why?

LEATHER MAN

I've jist tuck a notion—that's all. An' thur ain't nuthin' kin change it.

FRANK

I don't understand y', Joe.

LEATHER MAN

I aims to preach a last sermon.

FRANK

I'll let y', if I kin watch ye.

LEATHER MAN

It 'll be fittin'.

[CYRUS *knocks over a pot in the window.*]

FRANK

It's Cyrus. Lil must of left him.

CYRUS

So.—Y' killt Sarah!—I swore I'd git y'.

FRANK

Damn y', shet up! Y' can't do nuthin'.

CYRUS

Damn you.

LEATHER MAN

Y're too late, Cyrus. Y're too old.

[CYRUS, *who has been thrown back on his knees, rises, sees how helpless he is—and suddenly, changing his tactics, turns and starts picking his way back along the porch, as fast as he can. His canes tap quickly.*]

FRANK

He's goin' to git Lil. [CYRUS *hurries.*] Stop him, Joe!

[*The* LEATHER MAN *pulls* CYRUS *back, struggling.*]

CYRUS

Let go!—leggo, y' son of Satan—y' bigamist, y' murderer!

[*In a burst of energy, he manages to break loose, and starts backing off toward the kitchen door, keeping the* LEATHER MAN *at a distance by jabbing with his canes.*]

CYRUS

Dave an' Lil ain't never goin' to be jined while I'm alive.

[*The* LEATHER MAN *seizes him again.*]

CYRUS

Lil, Lil!

FRANK

Shut his wind, Joe.

[*The* LEATHER MAN *puts his hand over* CYRUS'S *mouth.*]

CYRUS

LIL!

[*In the struggle, he falls, and lies quiet on the door-stone.*]

LEATHER MAN

Guess his head hit the door-stone.

FRANK

What is he—dead?

LEATHER MAN

Broke his neck. He done what he could.

FRANK

Yea-a; he's ninety-four.

LEATHER MAN

It ain't many live to what they kin—me least of 'em.

FRANK

Jist leave him lay. It's all over.

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, he's gone. Me an' you, we're waitin' yit—you an' me an' Satan. The best a man kin do is what he's a mind to.

FRANK

Someone 's comin'. Help me, Joe.

LEATHER MAN

I'll stay up, so long's it's safe. The devil ketched me, this time. Y' can't git away from nature—not far. She'll ketch y' an' cradle y' up ag'in. Y're after me to murder Irve now.

FRANK

He quit Lil. Ain't y' got no vengeance in ye?

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a—vengeance—but thur's two bloods in me:—one's vengeful, an' t'other takes me wand'rin' the hills, fergitful of everythin'—'ceptin' the rain an' the sun an' the smell of the mornin'. Lil 's got Sarah's blood in her. Seems like none of mine don't take after me.

FRANK

Y' ain't backin' down?

LEATHER MAN

Well, some is a-feared of thur conscience.

FRANK

None is, that 'mounts to nuthin'.

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, that's true. I used to watch folks settin' in Daddy's church—primpin' up thur mouths to the north side of charity. An' then—when they wuz loose from the Lord—I 'd go nigh deaf, all week—listenin' to 'em talkin' down thur conscience—by the stren'th of other's sins, or thur own troubles.

FRANK

Git down.

LEATHER MAN

Them times, beef critters seemed better 'n humans. So I'm goin' to do that marryin' an' that preachin' yit.

[*The* LEATHER MAN *points* FRANK *into the house, and then goes down the well.* FRANK *hitches around* CYRUS *to the door and goes in. A lamp is lit inside.*

Enter LIL. *She carries* CYRUS'S *fiddle and stands a moment in the lighted door-way—trying to see* CYRUS.]

LIL

Pa, whur be you?

FRANK

[*Approaching, inside.*] What did y' leave him fer? [*She appears, behind* LIL.]

LIL

To git the fiddle, up attic.

FRANK

Serves y' right, fer leavin' him. [*She points.*] Thur he lays.

[*Enter* DAVE *and* UNCLE KY, *from left.* LIL *bends over* CYRUS—*gets down on her knees.*]

LIL

Pa? I can't see y'!—Pa . . . [*Then, realizing that he is dead, she rises to her feet, and speaks with deep suspicion of* FRANK.]—Fell, did he?

FRANK

Yea-a, on the door-stone.

LIL

Help me, Dave.

UNCLE KY

[*Very low.*] He's dead.

DAVE

His neck 's broke.

[*The two men pick* CYRUS *up and start to carry him.*]

LIL

He's goin' to jine Sarah.

[*They carry him inside.*

LIL *follows them in. . . . A pause. . . .* LIL *comes out again, picks up the two canes and murmurs:*]

LIL

Pa's hosses.

[*She goes back, inside, with a sob. . . .*

There is a pause in the dim light. . . . Then UNCLE KY *comes out—a vague shadow—and bends over the well. The quavering strains of* "Annie Laurie" are *heard, as the curtain falls.*]

Act Three

The interior of the Turner house, looking out onto the back yard and the well.

The door leading outside is up stage, left center. The corner of the room, up left, has no window, but there is a small table in the corner on which are a fiddle and a banjo. Two old-fashioned reed-bottomed kitchen chairs stand by the table.

On the right side of the door are two windows, seen in Acts One and Two. Under these, a rectangular table.

There is a door, up right—into the milk room.

There is also a door, down left, into another room of the house.

There is a kitchen-stove, down right, with a wood closet in the wall beside it, and there are evidences of a big stone chimney, just behind the stove. The chimney is concealed by plaster.

The entire room is plastered with weather-stained mopboards and other wood work. There are old latches on the doors, sticks to hold up the window sashes, a few potted geraniums in tin cans, spool of thread and needle on the window ledge, etc.
The ceiling is low. The plaster is smoke-stained and somewhat cracked.
The room does not run parallel to the footlights, but slanting, so that the back wall is further down stage on the left than on the right. The stage depth on the left, however, should be not less than seven feet.
All doors eventually lead outside, though the door, up left center, is the only one that opens directly out to the back yard.

As the curtain rises, FRANK, LIL, UNCLE KY *and* SNIFFIN *are seen in the room.*
They are dressed in gala attire, and are going about the various activities preceding a wedding.

FRANK

[*Indicating the door, down left.*] The parlor is too small fer sich a gatherin'.

LIL

I like the kitchen best.

SNIFFIN

[*To* FRANK.] How 'd y' hear 'bout Irve bein' dead?

LIL

They got word over to town—the family did.

SNIFFIN

Y' don't mind me talkin' 'bout Irve on y'ur weddin' day?

LIL

No, Sniffin, I'm glad to remember Irve, to-day.

FRANK

I reckon three year is mournin' long enough. Time y' fergot!

SNIFFIN

Y're a lawful widder, Lil.

FRANK

Better go jine the frolic. Company 's all out to the orchard, celebratin'. I can't git out no more.

LIL

Storm 's gatherin'. I'll tell 'em to come to the house 'fore it rains. [*She goes.*]

SNIFFIN

I 'll see this weddin' runs reg'lar—an' legal—me bein' sheriff now. [*Exit* SNIFFIN.]

[FRANK *wipes the table and goes off into the milk room, up right, carrying some debris from the wedding fixings.*

As soon as she is gone, the LEATHER MAN'S *head appears at the window. It disappears. Then he appears at the door, center. He is holding* IRVE *by the scruff of his neck, and propels him ahead into the room.*]

IRVE

[*Low and scared.*] I warn't to blame. She wuz the one left me.

LEATHER MAN

You went off, sonny.

IRVE

I wuz jist off on a trip.

LEATHER MAN

Gone three years till I found y'.

IRVE

I tell y' she's my wife!

LEATHER MAN

Y' still think y' love her?

IRVE

Sure I do.

LEATHER MAN

That's what I brung y' here to find out. Y' got to prove it afore the hull company. Y' do it now—Frank—[*He draws his finger across his throat suggestively.*] 'll kill ye. Don't be foolish. Git in the wood closet.

IRVE

But suppose—

LEATHER MAN

Frank ain't keepin' a fire to-day.

IRVE

How 'll I git out ag'in?

LEATHER MAN

When the ceremony is started—y' kin *come* out! Or y' kin sneak out after it's done—if y'd rather. I'll see y' git the chanc't.

IRVE

I'd of got along with Lil—only—I married too soon —that's all.

LEATHER MAN

I ain't forcin' y' in nuthin'.

IRVE

The kid died, y' know.

LEATHER MAN

Thur's two died.

IRVE

Y' mean—?

LEATHER MAN

Umm! She named it Irve. Now it's up to you. I ain't followed y' over the length of the states to make a mistake—but so y' kin take whut the Lord give y'—if He give it. Life's wuth gettin' out whut's in it. That's whut y' got it fer. All right, brother?

IRVE

All right—but I don't understand y'.

LEATHER MAN

I'm the Leather Man, sonny—folks does whut I says —sometimes—I dunno why. It don't last—but, thur ain't no escapin' when the vanishin' moment is speakin' —an' sometimes it's speakin' in me.—Git!

[IRVE *vanishes into the wood-closet, down right. The* LEATHER MAN *closes the door, and moves to the table to munch a cookie.* FRANK'S *chair is heard thumping. Then the door to the milk-room opens again and* FRANK *herself enters.*]

FRANK

It's time fer y' to come preach.

LEATHER MAN

[*Exhibiting a squat bottle.*] Frank, this here bottle is the last of the rum. Me an' Ky wuz too much fer it— 'specially Ky.

FRANK

Y'd ought to throw a cape over them clothes.

LEATHER MAN

Not me. Thur won't be no trouble. Once they see me, the weddin' ceremony 'll run as slick as grease. But—

FRANK

But what?

LEATHER MAN

Y're still set on this weddin'?

FRANK

I be.

LEATHER MAN

Sometimes, Frank, I think thur ain't no use in nuthin'. The blackness rises up in the back of my mind—comes on me—an' drags me down—like I wanted to rest—rest with all the other ginerations of man, that has passed away since Adam tuck a fancy to himself—an' said he wuz God—if he could live up to his fancy.

FRANK

Them times, men is weak.

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, they is weak. They git so over women—over an' often ag'in—an' lackin' women thur's rum—an' mostly they don't understand neither of 'em. I shore don't understand you, Frank. Thur ain't no weakness in y'.

FRANK

No, thur ain't. Y' re comin' to do the marryin'?

LEATHER MAN

I'm comin', sure.

FRANK

Here's Cyrus's Bible fer y'.

LEATHER MAN

I ain't superstitious—but a prayer book is all I need. [*He exhibits one.*]

FRANK

Be y' scairt? Killin' Irve wuz a pleasure—an' I let y' do it—only *I* couldn't. But—I still got stren'th in my hands—an' y' fail me—I'll do fer y'. It's gettin' late. Don't be behind-hand.

LEATHER MAN

I won't, Frank. To-night's goin' to be my night. [*Exit* LEATHER MAN, *outdoors, at center.*]

[FRANK *goes into the parlor—up, right.* IRVE *emerges, cautiously and fearfully, from the wood-closet. The* LEATHER MAN *suddenly reappears in the door, center, and catches* IRVE *in the act. There is not a sound except*

the slight scuff of his feet. IRVE *is afraid and catches up a bread knife—from the stove.*]

LEATHER MAN

I ain't goin' to tech y'. I'm givin' y' your chanc't.

IRVE

[*Very uneasy*]. Sunthin' might happen—to *you.* [*Then, abashed, he slinks back into the closet.*]

[*People are heard approaching, outside. The* LEATHER MAN *slips hastily out the door. The crowd approaches. People enter, more or less in the order of their speeches.*]

UNCLE KY

[*Illustrating his sentiments.*] I think—I think—I will have a little more cider.

CHAPPY

[*A pudgy, wistful, moon-faced little man.*] Ain't thur an awful lot of flies! The hosses is most ett up. Guess they 're tame flies—ain't they?

DAVE

[*To persons entering.*] All 'ceptin' pus'n'l friends—go 'round front.

CHAPPY

That's good corn y' got in the garden, Ky.

UNCLE KY

Well, a tall man is good fer plantin' corn. He won't crowd the seed—'cause when it drops, them seeds falls so fur the air spreads 'em.

CHAPPY

That's an idee.

UNCLE KY

I seen a man workin' on bean seed. He put 'em in, one to a time. [*He illustrates with his fingers.*]

IKE

Huh!

UNCLE KY

Looked like he wuz pinchin' 'em.

DAVE

Cider—help yourselves.

[SNIFFIN *enters with some others.*]

IKE

Minister comin'?

CHAPPY

Who is he?

FRANK

[*At the door, up right.*] He's brought-on from outside.

SNIFFIN

She ain't tellin'. Thur 's sunthin' queer 'bout him.

IKE

You got my glass, Sniffin.

SNIFFIN

They look alike.

IKE

Yea-a, y're right, Snif. They look alike to me. Fact is, I don't know which is *most* alike.

UNCLE KY

I think—I think—I will have a little more cider.

SNIFFIN

Sure y' ain't agin a frolic—'count it bein' a weddin' —the kid an' all?

LIL

No, I like 'em—'specially with music an' dancin'. An' the young un's dead, Bill. Can't hurt him none.

SNIFFIN

Too bad.

LIL

Y' see them roses outside. He's under 'em.

CHAPPY

They look nice.

[*Inadvertently discovering a photograph on the wall.*] Well, if there ain't Cyrus!

DAVE

Yea-a, that's a photograph a feller tuck of the "Old Man."

SNIFFIN

Canes an' all—two canes—I remember.

LIL

He called 'em his hosses. Had 'em dry an' hard, so's when he'd drop 'em they'd chink. Had 'em so 's they'd chink.

DAVE

Yea-a, y' notice he's kind-a happy thur. Sort of as if to say "To hell with this, anyway."

LIL

The old man, he wuz a real nice old man. He liked to talk to me.

CHAPPY

I know he did.

LIL

I wish't he'd lived to see the baby. [*She goes out, down left.*]

SNIFFIN

Lil wuz real fond of her kid, warn't she?

IKE

Yea-a, it wuz too bad.

SNIFFIN

It gits a woman.

IKE

It's jist as well she kin marry ag'in.

CHAPPY

Yea-a, I believe in it.

UNCLE KY

I think—I think—I have had enough.

SNIFFIN

Give us a tune, Dave, an' let's have a dance.

IKE

Preacher 's about due, ain't he?

SNIFFIN

Well, jist till he comes. It 'll stiddy y'ur nerves, Dave. What y' say to a little music, Lil?

LIL

Yea-a, I'd like it. I miss the organ.

SNIFFIN

Whut struck it?

LIL

The webbin' to the pedals wore out—an' I can't git none new that'll fit.

CHAPPY

I got some to the store I'll bring y'—fer a weddin' present—won't cost y' nothin'.

SNIFFIN

Dave's tunin' up. You too, Lil. Y're good to the banjo.

DAVE

Lil 's a good hand to the banjo and raisin' chickens.

[LIL *smiles.*]

CHAPPY

That 's right.

DAVE

What 'll y' have—*Captain Jinks?*

SNIFFIN

That's a good one—git four couple who kin dance.

UNCLE KY

Yea-a, who jist know how to go through.

SNIFFIN

It's all in the time, y' know.

DAVE

Yea-a, it's all in the time.

UNCLE KY

[*With distinct deliberation.*] Practice makes perfect, as they say.

SNIFFIN

"Cap'n Jinks—Cap'n Jinks,
Throw the man who never drinks!"

That's the way it goes. Then— "*All hands 'round*" an'—

"Throw the man with the big feet!"

Who 'll call?

A MAN

Whur 's Rarnee?

SNIFFIN

Dave, *you* call.

LIL

[*Going over to a chair, carrying her banjo.*] We had some good parties—but trouble wuz, some fellers went to drinkin' an' spiled it.

DAVE

Clear the floor, everybody!

IKE

[*Clearing the floor.*] What 's that quilt?

LIL

It's jist Uncle Ky's bed. He's visitin' ag'in. He's here most of the time, but leaves some.

SNIFFIN

He sleeps on the floor?

LIL

Yea-a, he growed that way—livin' alone.

CHAPPY

[*Wistfully.*] Didn't he never marry?

DAVE

No, an' now he won't sleep in a bed.

IKE

Why not?

LIL

I reckon it's too much trouble to git loose from his clothes. Y' git queer, livin' alone.

SNIFFIN

Let Lil choose the dance.

ALL

Good idee. That's it. Come on, Lil. Don't be bashful. Lil 's good to choosin'.

LIL

I kind-a fancy the *Hawk an' Bird.*

DAVE

Fine tune to it. Let's go. [*He draws on his fiddle.*] Git y'ur places! Kin y' hear, thur, in t'other room?

A MAN

We kin hear plain.

DAVE

Who's that at the door?

SNIFFIN

It's jist Uncle Ky.

IKE

He's tryin' to decide whether to go or come.

SNIFFIN

Allus dance the way the boards run in the floor. Whur's fust couple? Andy an' Evy is third—then second—then fourth.

[*The couples begin to mingle and tap their feet.*]

DAVE

"Way down south, whur I wuz born"—
But it's all in the time.

[*All stamp—and the dance begins to the fiddle and banjo.*]

SNIFFIN

Fust couple to the head of the room, third to the bottom, two an' four on the sides.—Let's go!

[*The dance begins.* DAVE *and* LIL *are both seated. A*

few others are seated, but most stand. SNIFFIN *is master of ceremonies and does the "calling."*]

SNIFFIN

Three hands around the bird!

[*At this call, the Girl of the first couple steps into the center of the floor, and her partner and the third couple join hands and dance around her.*]

Bird fly out, an' hawk fly in!

[*At this call, the Man of the first couple goes inside the ring, the Girl takes his place, and the action is repeated.*]

Hawk fly out, an' give birdie a swing!

[*At this call, the Man breaks out and swings his partner, and the third couple swings, and both go back to position.*]

Let's go!

[*At this call, the whole group join hands and dance half way around the room, and back again to position.*]

Next couple, dance!

[*At this call, the action is repeated between the second and fourth couples, as it was between the first and third. At the close,* SNIFFIN *yells:*]

Let's go!—You know where!

[*So the dance goes till interrupted. The onlookers stamp their feet in time to the music. The two non-participating couples stamp. There are laughs and occasional comments from the by-standers. In the exuberance of the dance "all hands 'round" often becomes more prolonged than a half turn. The swinging is usually regular, but occasionally boisterous.* DAVE *grins all over and saws furiously, stamping his feet.* LIL *taps her toe and plays the banjo—otherwise motionless. The interruption comes in the form of a* MAN *bursting in from outside.*]

THE MAN

The hosses is all run off!

[*No one pays much attention to him, but he gets the interest of a few and the news spreads. The dance is neglected and breaks up.* LIL *stops her banjo.* DAVE *is the last to catch the change.*]

DAVE

What 's the trouble?

LIL

The hosses is all run off.

DAVE

Someone must of set 'em loose.

IKE

[*At the door.*] I seen the Leather Man!

SNIFFIN

You sure?

IKE

Sure 's shootin'.

CHAPPY

Thur's a turruble big storm a-comin'.

ALL

The storm—thunder too—it's sure comin'.

SNIFFIN

I ain't skeered of no Leather Man. I'd like to meet up with him. I ain't sheriff fer nuthin'.

CHAPPY

I'm goin' to git my hosses.

[*Some go and some stay.*]

DAVE

The hosses is clear to the main road by now. It's rainin' a'ready.

CHAPPY

[*Returning in agitated haste.*] I seen the Leather Man. He's comin' with the storm.

IKE

Someone is due to die.

SNIFFIN

I kin hear him. [*Thunder sounds.*] It's rainin' fit to kill.

[LIL *closes the windows, all but one.*]

A MAN

The hosses is all gone down the lane.

A WOMAN

All my new shawls wuz in the buggy.

CHAPPY

Thur ain't no use chasin' 'em in this storm.

UNCLE KY

They 'll stop 'em, down below.

A MAN

The waggin 'll be all broke to slivvers. I'm goin' a'ter 'em.

DAVE

Better look out fer the Leather Man.

ANOTHER MAN

I'm goin', too.

[*They leave together.*]

DAVE

[*Closing the remaining window.*] Might rain in. [*He shuts the door.*]

UNCLE KY

Gettin' turruble dark.

SNIFFIN

Best light up.

DAVE

God, yes—light the lamp, Lil! [LIL *lights the lamp, but it flares up and then dims.*]

LIL

Thur ain't much oil.

SNIFFIN

I hear leather.

CHAPPY

Can't hear nuthin' fer the rain.

A MAN

If the Leather Man 's real—now, I tell y', he's goin' to git his.

A WOMAN

Folks like him deserve lynchin'. Y' can't tell what he'd do.

IKE

By God—stick him—same as a pig—that's what I say.

[*The lamp expires. Thunder and lightning. A woman shrieks.*]

UNCLE KY

It's hittin' clos't.

DAVE

Whew!

LIL

Dave never did like lightnin'.

CHAPPY

Lil ain't scairt.

A WOMAN

Lil ain't scairt of nuthin'.

CHAPPY

I do hear sunthin'.

LIL

Sure 'nough.

[*A squeaking and thumping is heard outside the house. It grows louder and louder.*]

DAVE

[*Trying, with shaking hands, to load the shot-gun.*]

Damn these shells—thur!

SNIFFIN

Thur's a team, out thur. [*He approaches the door.*] The rain 's quit.

DAVE

Holt still—look out the winder, Chappie.

CHAPPY

I don't see no call to.

SNIFFIN

Go look yourself, Dave.

DAVE

I'm clumsy, might upset sunthin'—an' make a noise.

LIL

Ssst!

UNCLE KY

No Leather Man don't sound so. I know he don't. I claims it's a ghost. [*There is a sudden sharp rapping at the door.*] Praise God—amen!

[DAVE *drops his gun.*]

SNIFFIN

Ssst!

[*Again rapping.*]

FRANK

Open the door—it's the minister.

LIL

Yes, Ma.

[*As she approaches the door, it opens of itself—and the* LEATHER MAN *steps in. He carries, trailing, a mass of harness which squeaks as he throws it on the floor.*]

ALL

The Leather Man! Git back. That's our harness. He tuck the harness off.

LEATHER MAN

Frank—the last of the rum is in me.

SNIFFIN

[*In awed undertone.*] It spoke to Frank.

DAVE

O-o-o! God!

LEATHER MAN

The preacher has come—an' it's me. I'm a minister to God, an' I'm pleased to see y' so worshipful. I is a legal preacher like—an' more 'n that.

CHAPPY

Amen!

LEATHER MAN

I be a preacher what understands the everlastin' an' everlastin'—world without end. Now, folks, y'll listen while we do the formalities. [*He moves.*] The bride is here. So is the groom.—An' *others* is here. We is all here afore God. [*A commotion in the crowd.*] An' it is fittin' y' should all listen quiet—an' not skin out. Them in t'other room, likewise. Y'ur hosses is gone. Here's y'ur harness. Any man leaves this house—ain't a-goin' to live to git home. Holt still! The bride an' the groom'll stant up an' come forrard. [*They do.*] We is here gathered to jine this man an' this woman. It ain't a jinin' to be done lightly—but sober an' discreet by both—in the name of the Lord. This woman is a legal widder. She—believes it. [*He pauses and looks at the wood-closet.*] If anybody in this room—knows it ain't so—now is the time fer him to come out—an' say so. [*Nothing happens.*—LEATHER MAN *turns.*] Jine hands. [*They do.*] Dave Turner—true born O'Hegan—will y' have this woman to be y'ur wedded wife—to live with in matri-

mony, forever? Will y' watch after her in sickness an' sorrer—an' stick to her forever?—Speak.

DAVE

Yes.

LEATHER MAN

Lil Turner—will y' take this feller, Dave—to love an' honor, day an' night—an' obey him when he's scairt—an' not leave him nohow—nor let him leave you—like Irve done—forever?

LIL

I will.

LEATHER MAN

For in as much—as these here two has seen the light—an' consented to marriage together—with this here crowd of witnesses—an' for in as much as—

[*The door of the closet bursts open, projecting* IRVE *into the room.*]

IRVE

Stop!

ALL

Help!—God save us!—It's Irve. It's Irve.

IRVE

It's me, Irve.—Lil, they lied to y'. I ain't dead.

LEATHER MAN

You come alive kind-a late, young feller.

IRVE

Well, I reckon I'm speakin' the truth, one time. She's my wife, an' he knew it. He knew it all the time.

[*The* Crowd *raises its voice: "By God!—I told y'.—Stick him!"*]

FRANK

Y' tricked me, Joe. Y' didn't kill him.

[*The* CROWD *makes way for her, as she hitches forward in her chair.*]

LEATHER MAN

No, Frank. I didn't know him well enough fer that. Mebby—I don't yit.

FRANK

Damn y' fer jinin' Sarah an' Lot's wife agin me. An' damn you, Irve. An' damn the hull kaboodle of y'!

[*She hitches on.*]

IRVE

It wuz him made me hide.

FRANK

Joe, I'm comin'!

[IRVE *retreats, but* FRANK *disregards him.*]

LEATHER MAN

Y're a mite slow, Frank. [*He moves to the top of a table in another part of the room.*] Folks, the milk's spillt. An' Frank, the rum's gone. I ain't no more to stay fer. Listen, folks, to a sermon.

FRANK

[*Obstructed by the* CROWD.] Ketch him—ketch him!

[*The* CROWD *presses in on the* LEATHER MAN.]

LEATHER MAN

Ain't I the Leather Man? Y' can't tech me, fer fear of the Devil. [*The* CROWD *pushes back a bit.*] But I'm goin' to spit y' a mouthful, an' pass away from y' forever an' ever. . . . Folks, it wuz me killt Sarah. In the heat of rum an' keerless ways of youth, I done it. An' the Devil himself kip me company ever since—clos't as hide to leather. But he ain't never rid me. Most allus we agreed, but we wuz apart. Me an' the Devil wuz demo-

crats—each equal each. Ain't only the regrets of foolishness I got—that's all—but it's plenty. Me an' the Devil, we agreed. An' I kep company with Frank. She's a real keen woman, Frank is,—but the bile in her is steepin' with the pains of hell in her leg jints—here 'mongst the livin'. But her an' me we been company—an' we ett with the Devil together.

FRANK

Won't someone give me a hand!

LEATHER MAN

But jist this last, here—we disagreed over killin' Irve. I seen it comin', an' then the rum give out. 'T wuz me brung Irve here to-day—to see wuz he man enough to stand up fur his own. [*He turns, facing* LIL *and* IRVE.] Him an' Lil kin go on now—together.

CHAPPY

It's Uncle Ky's brother!

FRANK

Yea-a, an' he 's Lil's own Pa.

LIL

My Pa!

FRANK

Your Pa.

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, I'm y'ur Pa. Lil, that's whut y' got to work with. Like Irve an' me an' all these—that's whut y' got to raise into the vanishin' moment.

IRVE

How you mean—raise?

[LIL *turns to listen.*]

LEATHER MAN

You an' Irve—by goin' on—adventurin'—darin'—lovin', mebby. It'll change y'. It'll change me. It'll change all of us—to as great—as any kin imagine. It'll change the moment of time—into the moment of eternity.

IKE

Preachin' Joe!

LEATHER MAN

[*Turning on the* Crowd.] But you all is layin' down an' fallin' behind in the stream of the world. [*More quietly to all.*] The vanishin' moment is in the livin' of dreams. In it y' kin be all y' ve a mind to.

LIL

Y' killt my Ma.

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, the facts ain't easy. Some 'd ruther be comforted than go huntin', Lil. But you [*Proudly.*]—you're mine. [*To the crowd again.*] Of y' all—'cept Lil—thur ain't been but one—follered me to the end.—That wuz a dog,—old Blue. He wuz huntin' to the end. The rest of y' is settin' in the sands of time. That's the kind y' are! The pride of y'ur own unknowin' an' dyin'-out is on y'. —

FRANK

Don't let him git to the door.

LEATHER MAN

Folks, I ain't no sinner.

SNIFFIN

Prove it!

LEATHER MAN

I done my wrongs—an' had my mistakes a-plenty. But see here. Ain't I kep' more men to home nights, than all the preachers what ever shifted one foot onto t'other—in the confines of the pull-pit?

UNCLE KY

That's right—that's right.

LEATHER MAN

Listen, folks—why did I go runnin' wild? I'll tell y'. I used to listen to Daddy preachin', when he'd 'ruther be settin' watchin' the bees—that's why.

A MAN

Amen fer you!

LEATHER MAN

An' I sez to myself: The best a man kin do is what he's a mind to.

SNIFFIN

That's true—but it ain't legal.

LEATHER MAN

Kin y' look me in the eye, Sniffin? No. Kin y' dare a ghost when y' re alone, at night, in the holler of the mountain—when the owls is whoopin' mournful, in the deep of the woods—like the Devil wuz breathin' on his fingers—a-fore he 'd ketch y' by the back of the neck! No! A man gits respec' fer his self.

FRANK

Keep that door shet.

[*They bar the door.*]

LEATHER MAN

Frank 's ketchin' up on me.—But when a man gits respec' for hisself—the storm may toss him—or the rot of sin ketch him—like an old log gettin' punky on the damp of the ground—but he's thur. Yes, sir, he's thur. Along with all the rest of creation, he's thur, too.—Frank, lay off me!

FRANK

Now I've got y', y' won't be here long.

LEATHER MAN

Frank, y're foolish.

FRANK

'Spite of all y'ur talkin'—I reckon y'll hang same as anybody.

LEATHER MAN

Yea-a, Frank, I reckon I'd make y' a nice piece of wash on the line—but—I'll be rememberin' Sarah on

my death. I'll be down by the brook ag'in—the water slitherin'.

FRANK

A rope 'round y'ur neck 'll twist y'ur thinkin'.

LEATHER MAN

But not yours. I remind y' of Sarah, what I killt in the beginnin' of her time. Think of it—an' don't y' do likewise—or y 'll be thinkin' after. I ain't a-feared of hangin'. To-morrer ain't here—an yistiddy 'll never come ag'in. It's all mixed up. An' when y're tired, thur's sleep fer y' an' death. But a man, nor a woman, oughtn't to be tired, lessen he be full to nappin' with the beauty of the world. You an' me kin ketch a lot yit in this world.

FRANK

We're gittin' old. Not old but faded—but y're talkin', Joe—like days I kin remember—young damn fool days—but it won't help y'.

LEATHER MAN

The finish had ought to be—like we had got up a appatite fer eatin' sleep—not jist fallin' into it.

FRANK

Adventurin'.

LEATHER MAN

An' after life—death 's the same thing. You an' me—we ain't no weaklin's, to be losin' the appatite of our senses.

FRANK

Huh?

LEATHER MAN

It's like a music, Frank.

FRANK

To hell with fiddlin'!

LEATHER MAN

The only music y' kin understand—an' what I love y' fer, Frank—is this one—this takin' in the days, like they wuz tasty—bitter, sweet, or nasty 's all the same—thur's taste to 'em. They 's strong like.

FRANK

Git along, then! It's lonesome I'll be. But mebby the ache of it 'll comfort me.

LEATHER MAN

It's lonesomer I'll be, wand'rin' the hills—but the stars is lonesomer. Thur ain't no more rum, Frank.

FRANK

Stiddy, all!

[*The* LEATHER MAN *kisses* FRANK—*salutes* LIL *by raising aloft his lifted hand—and leaps to the window, which he breaks.*]

LEATHER MAN

Who 'll foller me? Who 'll I be lurin' on—wand'rin' the hills? [*Exit, out window.*]

ALL

After him! Sick him, Sniffin!—You 'll all git time-witched.—Ketch him! It's clearin'.—Come on! I see him climbin' the cow lane.

[*The* CROWD *surges out after the* LEATHER MAN, *leaving* FRANK, LIL *and* IRVE *behind. Hitching toward the other room, down left,* FRANK *encounters* IRVE.]

FRANK

Hnn! [*She goes on and out.*]

[IRVE *and* LIL *are left alone.*]

IRVE

I heard about the kid—the second one.

LIL

Yea-a, little Irve.

IRVE

I'm sorry I left y'. But I come back. An' now I'm goin' to do right by y', Lil. I's determined my mind on it. Come back to me. I'll give y' a fortune, this time. I got rich a'ready.

LIL

You have?

IRVE

It ain't no lie—not this time.

LIL

No.

IRVE

Don't y' believe me? I ain't got so much—but enough.

LIL

Yea-a, I believe y', but I ain't comin'.

IRVE

Why?

LIL

We're dif'rent—you an' me.

IRVE

Nat'chully we be—but—I'm—I'm goin' out west. I got money now.

LIL

Y're gifted to success—what time y' got left.

IRVE

Come with me.

LIL

No, reckon I'm through.

IRVE

I'm doin' a favor to y'—to take y' back—after all this.

LIL

No y' ain't. Y' ain't able.

IRVE

O—I ain't? Why not?

LIL

My Pa might be a murderer—but he wuz my Pa.

IRVE

He ain't—"right." [*Taps his forehead.*]

LIL

Who is? Who wants to be? The hull of Honey Holler is strummin' music fer him—like it 'd never end. I'm through—but I kin listen to the brook water an' the crickets—an' them peep-frogs—they ain't tuned right. Ain't none of us tuned right, nuther. So they keep a-huntin'. An' I aim to listen.

IRVE

I don't understand y', Lil.

LIL

Life comes out of the dirt an' rubbish—grows up—an' romps round—some like our little baby. An' then dies down into the rubbish ag'in—like a fern gettin' yaller an' droopin', when the fust frost ketches it. Y 're uneasy, Irve.

IRVE

Huh?

LIL

I can't marry Dave—but me an' Dave an' Frank—we're like old beams, when they buckle with age an' rottin'.

IRVE

Which ain't no good.

LIL

They ain't no good, but even the slivvers in 'em is soft—like good loam. We're mixin's. All life 's jist mixin's—an' God keeps a-stirrin' of 'em,—a-stirrin' of 'em—as can't stir 'emselves—keeps movin' 'em along.

[*The* LEATHER MAN—*who unnoticed by* LIL *has been at the window for some time—slips inside.* LIL *sees him. They look at each other without movement.*]

LIL

Evenin', Pa.

LEATHER MAN

Lil—y' ain't takin' him?

LIL

No, Pa.

LEATHER MAN

Y're goin' to quit?—

LIL

Reckon I want to, Pa.

LEATHER MAN

Why, Lil?

LIL

It's a-quiet. Pa, I figger thur ain't much diff'rence 'tween a man an' a tree—a woman an' good ground—an' a couple of stars, even—if y've got the understandin' of it. They're all jist mixin's. I've had a winter and a summer, over an' over, thinkin' 'bout it. I'm sorry, Pa.

LEATHER MAN

I git turruble tired, Lil—times—

LIL

Y'd ought to rest, Pa.

LEATHER MAN

I can't. [*He gets up.*] O, I know what it is—to listen. On the mud flats, when the deer is drinkin'—an' y' hear the foxes yappin' in the timber—in the cold of the moon. Them an' the loon is callin' to one 'nother—laughin'.

IRVE

Laughin'?

LEATHER MAN

Kill or git killt, they's laughin'—heh!

IRVE

What they laughin' fer, then?

LEATHER MAN

To make a music fer the footsteps of death—what's walkin' the hills—cuttin' off the pride of folks—comin' to mix an' mingle 'em ag'in—Lil—yes—them pompous owls is shiverin' thur feathers—an' snappin' thur beaks agin fate—settin' yaller-eyed on the roost limb—grumblin' to 'emselves. Y' kin allus listen—but some of us can't stop huntin'. Like them damn card-an'-spins—allus tunin'—never ketch the time—but allus tunin'—Frank all right?

LIL

She's gone to lay down.

LEATHER MAN

She 'll come 'round. Remember y'ur Pa, Lil—fer he ain't never comin' back ag'in.

LIL

Pa.

LEATHER MAN

He's goin' travelin' on—like a darn fool.

LIL

Nights, I'll listen fer y', Pa—goin' by on the ridges of the hills.

LEATHER MAN

Y'll hear me mostly a-fur off, in the dark of the moon—when the wind 's high in the stars, gal. [*He vanishes out the window.*]

[IRVE *starts fearfully, as* UNCLE KY *looms in the door.*]

IRVE

It's creepy 'round here.

LIL

[*Fiercely.*] Git out!

[IRVE *goes uncertainly.* UNCLE KY *watches him off—then scratches his head.*]

UNCLE KY

The rain's quit, but the eaves is drippin'.

LIL

The rain—yea-a—I like to listen to it pat.

[UNCLE KY *takes a seat by the stove.*]

UNCLE KY

Y' do?

LIL

Yea-a—in the puddles—thur's one in the door-stone.

[UNCLE KY *whistles* "Annie Laurie" *low to himself.* LIL *starts as if she heard a voice from the past—and in unbelieving imploring tones—but with knowledge of finality—says:*

LIL

Whut y' whistlin'?

UNCLE KY

Jist force of habit.

[LIL *crosses over and gets* CYRUS'S *canes.*]

LIL

Pa's hosses. He had 'em so they 'd chink. [UNCLE KY *goes over to the quilt on the floor, left.*] Old Father Time, Pa used to call you.

UNCLE KY

Yea-a, look at me—an' my father a minister! [*He picks his bed up.*] Well, I been 'round a lot—reckon I'll stay now.

LIL

Never goin' back to Visty?

UNCLE KY

[*Laying out his bed by the stove.*] No, y're all my kind now.

LIL

I guess mebby I be your kind, Ky. I never did 'preciate you before—Father Time.

UNCLE KY

[*Inside his bed.*] Yea-a, most folks don't. [*Pause.*] Kind-a chilly to-night. The sun is gettin' lower. Funny how hot it wuz a while ago—ain't it?

LIL

Yea-a.

[*The cricket sings, as the curtain slowly falls.*]